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ELLERY QUEEN

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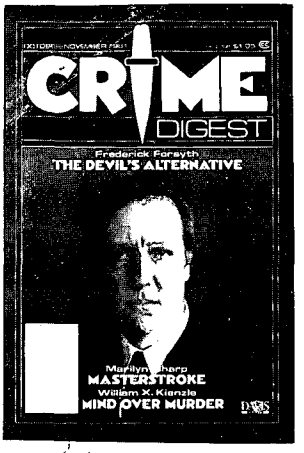

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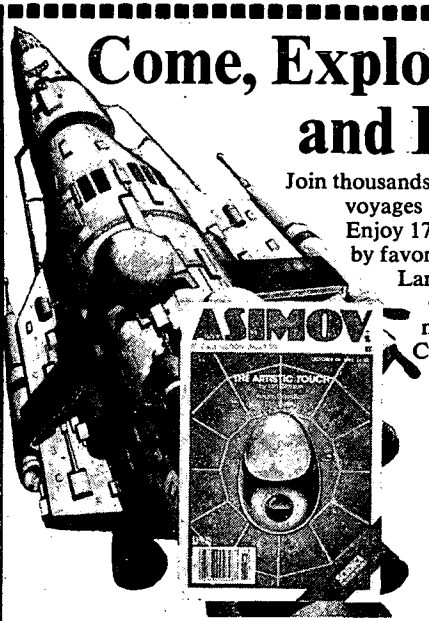

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a *NEW* Sir Gideon Parrot story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

In his first tale of Sir Gideon Parrot ("Lady of the Impossible," issue of May 20, 1981) Mr. Hoch began to mine a new vein of precious metal. Now Sir Gideon takes a second step into Parodyland (or should it be Parrotyland?).

Here's the recipe for this criminous cocktail: 1 part Rohmer's Dr. Fu Manchu (for the master criminal), 1 part Christie's THE BIG FOUR *(for the master detective), 1 part Old Sleuth (for the ambience), and 3 parts Hoch (properly pronounced). Mr. Hoch is having his fun with us in this "gentle spoof" . . .*

THE MAN WITH FIVE FACES

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Sir Gideon Parrot had been absent from New York for some time when I received an enigmatic summons by messenger announcing his return. It gave the address of a Mott Street hotel in lower Manhattan and cautioned: *Come for me here at seven Tuesday morning. My very life may depend upon you!* It was, as they say, a summons I couldn't refuse.

Mott Street was something of an oddity even by New York standards, running south from Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village through the Bowery, Little Italy, and Chinatown before coming to a sudden halt just a few blocks from City Hall. Though the street is mentioned in a song about Manhattan, relatively few New Yorkers have been there. As I sought out the number Sir Gideon had given me, the buildings seemed strange even to a native New Yorker like myself.

Finally I found it—a rundown hotel that catered to the fringes of

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society. A few years back it might have been called a flophouse, but one didn't hear that word much any more. As I entered and climbed the rickety stairs to the sleeping quarters on the second floor, a burly man in a dirty T-shirt suddenly blocked my path.

"You don't belong here, mister," he said, surveying my three-piece business suit. "What are you, a cop?"

"Hardly! I'm looking for a friend."

"You a lawyer? Somebody gonna sue me?"

"Not that I know of. Please step aside." When he didn't move, I added, "Unless you'd like me to call the cops, Mr.—?"

"Milt Quirk's the name. I'm the manager here. I gotta keep things under control, you know?" He stepped aside to let me pass.

When I reached the second floor my sensitive nostrils detected the remains of a sweetish odor—marijuana, perhaps, or some other narcotic. The place was divided into little cubicles, each one doorless but curtained, with common toilet facilities at the end of the hall. I couldn't imagine finding Gideon Parrot in such a foul place, but I tried calling his name anyway. "Gideon! Are you here?"

When no answer came I moved down the line of curtained doorways, glancing inside at the unshaven men just coming awake. I tried calling his name again, and this time I was rewarded by a rasping sound in reply. I yanked open one of the curtains and found Sir Gideon, barely recognizable, seated on a lumpy cot. His clothes were of the shabbiest sort, and had I not been seeking him I doubt if I would have taken this slender bird-like tramp as my old and dear friend.

"Gideon—thank God I've found you! But what are you doing in a place like this?"

"Get me out of here!" he croaked. "The narcotics fumes have affected my throat. I fear I'm both hoarse and dizzy."

"Here, lean on me. Do you have any belongings with you?"

"Only a tiny camera in my pocket. I brought nothing else."

I helped him down the stairs, but now the burly man named Quirk had been joined by another, smaller man. "What are you doing now?" the big man asked.

"Taking my friend home. He's ill."

The smaller man slipped a menacing hand into his pocket, but Gideon cleared his throat and rasped, "It would be a mistake to harm us. We are known personally to Sigmund Llama."

The name had its desired effect. Quirk put a hand on the other's shoulder. "We'd better check on this," he decided.

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That was all the hesitation we needed. Before they could change their minds we were out the door, hailing a passing cab. "Now tell me what you were doing there," I demanded when we were safely away.

"That hotel is the modern equivalent of an old opium den," Gideon explained, his voice stronger as he gradually recovered his composure. "Every type of narcotic is sold there, including opium. I disguised myself in these old clothes and spent the night to see what I could learn of the operation, but I sent you the message in the likely event I would need help of some sort to escape."

"Why concern yourself with an opium den, Gideon? In the past your criminal investigations have centered around a nicer class of people, to say the least."

He turned to me, his bird-like eyes bright with excitement. "For almost a year I have been on the trail of a master criminal named Sigmund Llama, sometimes called the man with five faces because he is said to maintain five separate identities in New York, London, Paris, Berlin, and Rome. I believe Llama controls fully half the drug traffic into New York and a substantial share in those other cities as well. That seedy hotel is one of his latest innovations—a modern variation to replace the old time opium den, just as massage parlors are replacing houses of ill repute. I observed a number of well-dressed men—and even a few women—enter the place during the night. I believe one of them might have been Sigmund Llama himself, since he's known to make inspection tours of his establishments when he's in the city."

"He's in New York now?"

Gideon Parrot nodded. "I have it from a reliable informant."

"Have you ever seen his face?"

"Never. I came close last summer in Paris, when I accompanied a police raid on a private airfield. He escaped in a private plane as we closed in, and the police opened fire on it. The plane crashed in flames about a mile away and we recovered a charred body. I thought it was the end of Llama, but a week later I heard he had turned up in Rome. The devil had somehow managed to escape from that plane."

"If he was ever on it."

"In any event, he's now in New York." He dipped a hand into the pocket of his shabby coat and produced a small camera. "I used an especially fast color film to photograph the comings and goings dur-

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ing the night. I believe a light at the top of the stairs provided enough illumination to capture their faces."

"Then you have a picture of this mysterious master criminal?"

"I'm sure of it. The problem is in determining which of last night's visitors was Llama."

Today was the first time I'd heard Sigmund Llama's name, but the stark cruelty of the man was made abundantly clear by a report on the evening news. Three hours after Gideon and I left the hotel on Mott Street it was destroyed by an explosion and fire that killed two employees.

Sigmund Llama was covering his tracks.

I joined Gideon for breakfast the following morning at his hideaway apartment on the upper east side. He was studying enlargements of the color photos he'd shot at the Mott Street hotel. I always enjoyed visiting his apartment with its spacious den overlooking the river, with walls bearing framed mementos of his past glories. Here I could relive the murder on the Stamford express, or the mysterious affair at Larchmont, or the murder of Roger A. Kroid. I could thrill again to the excitement of the chase.

"Those two men who were killed at the hotel, Gideon—"

He nodded sadly. "No doubt the two who tried to stop us. Sigmund Llama does not take kindly to failure. He destroyed the evidence, and two possible witnesses against him."

"He must be a ruthless man."

"He is that." As he spoke he removed the color enlargements from his desk drawer and spread them out for me. "You'll note there are four well-dressed men shown quite clearly. I believe one of them is Llama."

"Have you identified any of these people?" I asked.

"Only one. This man with the black beard is a fairly well known actor, Sam Matters. He's had parts on Broadway and also in London. I'm hoping he can identify the others for us."

"Could Matters himself be Llama?"

"Nothing is impossible. He makes frequent trips between London and New York, and could have visited the other cities under different identities. We must question him this morning."

Gideon and I found Sam Matters rehearsing for a new play at an off-Broadway theater located in a converted garage. He looked exactly like the photo Gideon had secretly taken two nights earlier. He was a man in his mid-thirties, though the beard added ten years

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to his appearance. We approached him during a reheasal break as he chatted with an attractive young woman in the cast.

"Could I speak with you in private?" Gideon said after introducing us.

Matters and the young woman exchanged glances. "I'll wait for you," she said and disappeared backstage.

The theater seats were narrow and uncomfortable, apparently salvaged from an old movie house. I sat on the edge of one as Gideon told the actor, "I am investigating the explosion and fire at a Mott Street hotel yesterday. Perhaps you read of it?"

"I may have seen something on the late news," he admitted.

"You were at that hotel on Tuesday night."

"Not me! You've got me confused with someone else."

Gideon produced the color photo from his pocket. "Do you deny this is you, sir?"

"What are you—police or something?"

"I am an independent investigator working on behalf of several governments," Gideon informed him. "I believe you know the reason for my inquiry. The Mott Street address was a modern version of an opium den, and you were one of its customers."

"You can't prove a thing!" Matters insisted.

"Are you trying to say you took a bed there for the night, dressed as you were? That's hardly likely."

Matters tugged at his beard, perhaps seeking a way out. Finally he said, "All right, what do you want?"

"The man at the top—the man who controls Mott Street and much of the other narcotics traffic in this city. I believe his name is Sigmund Llama."

"Never heard of him," the actor answered promptly.

"He travels widely in Europe, as you have done. He maintains several different identities, which might call for disguises. An actor like yourself could easily play that role."

Gideon's words struck home. The actor mumbled, "I just went there for a little coke sniffing, with a friend. I don't know anything about the narcotics traffic, and I never heard of this man Llama!"

Gideon pointed a bony finger at a second man in one of the photographs. "Is this your friend?"

"Yes. Hal Andor. He works for a Wall Street investment firm."

"How do you know him?"

"His wife Barbara is in this play with me. I was talking with her just a few minutes ago."

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He called Barbara from backstage and she rejoined them, carrying a styrofoam cup of coffee. Up close I could see the lines of middle age beginning to appear, but she was still lovely to look at, with golden hair framing a well-formed, intelligent face. "I was telling these gentlemen I was out with Hal on Tuesday night."

She nodded. "I can't imagine what they find to do all night, but I guess I'd rather not know."

Gideon produced one of the other color photographs. "Do you know either of these two men?"

Barbara Andor and Sam Matters both shook their heads. "Never saw them before," she said. "But I don't know too many people outside of show business."

"I'd like very much to meet your husband," Gideon said. "Can you arrange that?"

"I'll take you to his office right now. We may be able to catch him before lunch."

We left Sam Matters at the rehearsal and took a taxi down to Wall Street with Barbara Andor. Her husband's investment office, high up in one of those elaborate bank buildings that dated from the 1930s, seemed a busy enough place on this Thursday noon. We found Andor alone in his office, just finishing a phone conversation. He was a tall dark-haired man in his forties, and he smiled as his wife introduced us.

"They want to ask you some questions about Tuesday night," she told him.

"The hotel on Mott Street," Gideon said. "We're investigating the bombing there."

Andor was suddenly on the defensive. "Who told you I was there—Sam?"

"Yes."

"We went there for a little fun. I'm not involved in any bombing!"

Gideon produced his pictures again. "Can you identify these two men? They were also at Mott Street on Tuesday."

"I know them both slightly. Cedric Lane is a specialist in international law and Anton Legorian is a European trade representative."

"How do you happen to know them?"

"I had a brother who died last year. He was involved in a real-estate deal with them."

"Can you give me their addresses?"

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"Legorian has an office at the World Trade Center. Lane is at One Liberty Plaza."

Gideon noted the addresses. "Thank you. I may be calling on you again."

We left Barbara with her husband and walked to Cedric Lane's Liberty Plaza office. He was a stout man in his fifties who gave us very little time. He was on his way to Berlin the following day, he said, and had to finish up some business first. "I wasn't violating any law by just being at the Mott Street hotel," he snapped. "And you can't prove from this photograph that I used drugs of any sort."

"You travel a great deal overseas?" Gideon asked.

"It's necessary in my line of work. But I think that should be enough questioning. You do not represent the police, Mr. Parrot."

"The police of several nations are involved," Gideon informed him. "Perhaps your friend Mr. Legorian will be more cooperative."

"Then go badger him," Cedric Lane suggested. "Good day, gentlemen."

We found ourselves back on the street and Gideon remarked sadly, "He was most uncooperative."

"You think he could be Llama?"

Instead of answering, Gideon tapped my arm. "I believe we're being followed. I noticed that little foreign car earlier."

How anyone could follow us by car through the traffic-choked maze of lower Manhattan streets was beyond me, but as we strolled the short distance to the World Trade Center it did seem as if the little car managed to remain in view. Once it came close enough for me to catch a glimpse of the driver. He wore a scarf around the lower part of his face, though the day was quite balmy for April.

We rode the express elevator to an office high in the north tower of the World Trade Center. Anton Legorian maintained an office in a larger suite under the company name of Euro-Trade Associates, and he seemed to be expecting our arrival. "Cedric Lane phoned me," he admitted, speaking with a trace of accent. "There's little I can contribute to your investigation." He was dapper and middle-aged, with slick black hair and a pencil-thin mustache.

"You went to Mott Street to use narcotics?"

The man shrugged. "A little grass, nothing more. Mainly I went for companionship. I can buy the grass down there on the plaza any lunch hour for a dollar a joint."

"Some of your friends were snorting cocaine."

"What they do does not concern me."

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"You and Lane had a real-estate deal with Hal Andor's brother."

"That's correct. But he died before the deal could be completed. A heart attack, I believe, in France."

"You all travel a great deal."

"This is the jet age, Mr. Parrot. Our work demands it."

"What do you know about Sigmund Llama?"

"The name means nothing to me."

As we left the building I remarked to Gideon, "Another dead end, just like the others. Are you certain one of those four is really Llama?"

"We might learn more very soon. There's the car again, still following us. Come on, let's set a little trap."

We entered the side door of the new hotel across from the twin towers and waited. "Mind telling me what we're up to, Gideon?"

"He expected us to visit the Trade Center, so he waited outside. This stop is unexpected and he may follow us in." Of course Gideon was correct. Within three minutes our shadow had parked his car and trailed us inside. As he came through the revolving door Gideon reached out and grabbed the scarf from his face.

It was Milt Quirk of the Mott Street hotel—the man we'd believed had died in the fire.

Gideon and I acted quickly together, propelling the startled man through an unlocked door into one of the hotel's deserted conference rooms. "Suppose we talk," Gideon said. "We thought you died in the fire."

"Yeah," he admitted. "A lot of people did. But it was one of the bums who was still asleep from the night before. It's better this way. Pretending to be dead keeps me alive."

"Sigmund Llama wanted you dead, didn't he?"

The burly man eyed Gideon with new respect. "You know a lot, don't you?"

"Why are you following us?"

"Just tryin' to stay alive, is all. Llama figured I bungled, lettin' you get away from the hotel. He had the place blown up, hopin' to destroy me along with the evidence. I figure if I stick close to you it's my best chance of stayin' alive."

"Llama was there Tuesday night, wasn't he?"

"Yeah," the man admitted. "He always comes by when he's in town. But I don't know who he is. I've only talked to him on the phone, and he disguises his voice so's it always sounds different."

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"There were four well-dressed men who visited the hotel Tuesday night," Gideon said. "I took photographs of them."

"Yeah," Milt Quirk agreed. "I know the four you mean—Andor, the Wall Street guy, that lawyer Cedric Lane, the actor Sam Matters, and what's his name, Legorian. They've all been there before."

"And one of them is Llama."

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure. Some of 'em have come by before on nights when I'd heard he was in town. I started checkin' on them myself months ago, just to protect my own hide, you know? I figured if I knew who Llama was I might use it to plea bargain if the cops ever nabbed me."

"What did you learn about them?"

"All four have been to Europe lately. You know Llama is into lots of European cities besides New York."

"We know."

"But none of their trips quite match Llama's schedule. He was supposed to be in Paris once last summer and I know for a fact they was all in New York then. But Cedric Lane did go to Rome when Llama was there. And Matters was in a London play while Llama was bringing drugs across the channel. It drove me wild. I began thinkin' maybe I was all wet. Maybe Llama was someone else altogether."

"Like who?"

"That's the point—there's no one else! You spent the night at that flea-trap. You know we didn't get many uptown swells there. The society chicks would come down to get high once in a while, but they take a look at the dive and decide they'd rather snort cocaine in Park Avenue apartments. Andor brought his wife with him once and I thought she was gonna throw up when she saw the place.

"Anyway, those four were the only uptown regulars that could be Llama. The rest were bums and college kids out for a thrill. Legorian and Lane usually came together. Sam Matters was mostly alone, but the other night he came with Andor. Is that enough to keep me alive?"

"We'll see," Gideon told him. "Where are you hiding out?"

"I couldn't go back to my apartment, in case Llama had one of his men check there, so I took a room in the Village, on Bank Street near the river."

Gideon Parrot stared off into space. I could see an idea forming. After a moment he said, "I believe I have a scheme for luring Sigmund Llama into the open."

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"What would that be?" I asked.

"We could tell Llama that Milt here is still alive, and where to find him."

"Hey!" Quirk objected. "Wait a minute!"

"Don't worry, we won't give out your real address."

"How will you know which of the four to tell?" I asked.

He turned to Quirk. "What's your address on Bank Street?"

"Number 212. There's a row of five connected brownstones and I'm in the middle one. Second floor front."

"What are the other numbers?"

"They're all in a row—208, 210, 212, 214, and 216."

"Perfect!" Gideon decided. "We will telephone each of the four possible suspects anonymously and tell them that Quirk is alive and threatening to reveal Llama's true identity. We'll give each of them a different street number—of one of the four brownstones on both sides of your own."

"Why bring them so close to me?"

"Just stay in your room and you'll be safe. We'll be right across the street watching everything. Llama certainly won't come himself, but if we see anyone suspicious sneaking around one of those four brownstones we'll know which of the suspects sent him."

We escorted Quirk to his Bank Street apartment, making certain we weren't followed. Then we found a lunch counter across the street which offered a perfect view of the entire block. Gideon telephoned Legorian and Matters, telling them Quirk was at 208 and 210 Bank Street. I phoned Lane and Andor, using the numbers 214 and 216.

"Quirk is alive," I whispered into the mouthpiece when Lane's voice came on the phone. "He's threatening to tell the police that you're Sigmund Llama."

"What? Is this a joke?"

"It's no joke. Quirk is at 214 Bank Street." Then I hung up.

Gideon and I sat down to wait, choosing a booth in the front window of the coffee shop. "Those apartments may have back entrances," I pointed out.

He nodded. "But our man will surely case the building from the front at first. We should be able to spot him then. It's most likely he'll check the mail boxes for a familiar name."

And so we waited over cups of coffee.

We waited all afternoon and nothing happened.

One woman with a small child entered the building at 210.

A few school children ran yelling into 208 and 214.

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Nobody came in or out of 216.

Even the postman, who appeared at mid-afternoon, only stuffed a few letters into the boxes in each vestibule and hurried on his way. "He could have been checking the names," I pointed out to Gideon.

"It's a possibility. We'll wait and see what else happens."

But nothing did. We were well into the evening rush hour, with traffic picking up as people returned from work, but still there was nothing suspicious on Bank Street.

"Nobody even looks at any of those buildings," I grumbled. "I think we struck out on this one, Gideon."

Suddenly I froze in horror. There was smoke coming out the doorway of 212—Milt Quirk's building. Gideon saw it too, and he was out of the booth at once, leading the way across the traffic-congested street. "Fire!" a woman in an apron yelled, running out the door.

We hurried up the steps and inside. There was a barrel of burning trash by the stairs, funneling smoke to the upper floors. "Hurry!" Gideon shouted to me.

Almost at once we heard three quick gunshots from the floor above. I bounded up the stairs, already afraid of what I would find. Milt Quirk was sprawled in the doorway of his apartment, and this time he hadn't been so lucky. One bullet had struck him in the head and the other two in the chest.

"He's dead," I told Gideon.

We could hear footsteps above us, running to the roof. We followed them up, but the roofs of the buildings were all connected. By the time we reached the top there was no one in sight—and there were four other doors and fire escapes by which the killer might have escaped.

"I bungled badly," Gideon Parrot admitted. "I cost that man his life."

Fire engines and police cars were arriving in the street below. "How could you have been responsible, Gideon?"

"The killer lit that smoky trash fire to lure Quirk out of his room. As soon as he saw him he killed him."

"But how could he have learned the number of the real building from you? We gave all four of them false numbers!"

Before he could answer there were more shots from below. We ran downstairs and followed some policemen out of the back door of the building. A man we'd never seen before lay dead in a connecting alleyway, a revolver near his right hand.

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"Who shot him?" Gideon asked, identifying himself to the officer in charge.

"I did," the officer responded. "It was clearly a case of arson and I was checking the back when I saw this man come out of the next building. When I yelled to him he pulled a gun."

Gideon nodded. "You'll find his victim on the second floor. This will be the weapon that killed him."

Quirk's murder had been quickly avenged, but the dead man at our feet was only a tool of the mysterious Sigmund Llama. As we left the scene I said to Gideon, "It's another dead end. Llama sent that hit man, but now he's dead and won't be talking."

The evening had turned suddenly chilly. Gideon Parrot turned up the collar of his coat and said, "He doesn't need to talk. Now I know the identity of Sigmund Llama."

"But how could you?"

"Let us gather the four suspects together tonight and I will make everything clear."

We arranged the gathering for that evening at my apartment. The telephoned summonses were abrupt and urgent, since we knew at least one of the four would be on his way to Europe the following day. Gideon specified they should each come alone, and I wondered if he was ruling out the bizarre possibility that Llama might be a woman—Andor's wife Barbara.

Anton Legorian and Cedric Lane arrived within minutes of each other, a little before nine. They accepted glasses of white wine from me and settled down on the sofa. The next arrival was Sam Matters. "I should be at rehearsal," he announced. "This better be important."

When Hal Andor had joined them, Gideon said, "I'll get this over with as quickly as possible, gentlemen. I summoned you all here tonight to talk about a man known as Sigmund Llama."

"As a lawyer I find this most high-handed," Cedric Lane grumbled.

"Not at all," Gideon murmured. "You came of your own free will." He looked around at the four in turn. "As you know, the hotel on Mott Street was destroyed by an explosion and fire. As you may not yet know, its manager, Milt Quirk, was murdered earlier this evening in a Bank Street brownstone where he was hiding out. He was killed by a hired hit man."

"What's all this got to do with us?" Sam Matters asked.

"The bombing of the hotel and the murder of Quirk were both ordered by the same person—a master criminal known as Sigmund

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Llama who controls a large share of European and American narcotics traffic. I believe Sigmund Llama is in this room."

There were gasps of surprise and disbelief from all four men. "You can't be serious!" Sam Matters protested. "You're accusing one of us simply because we were at that hotel Tuesday night?"

Gideon turned to face him. "No, Mr. Matters, I have other pieces of evidence as well. This has been a case bound up in the number five—Llama is known as the man with five faces, and he operates in five cities. And I can offer five clues to his identity."

Anton Legorian snorted. "Don't keep us in suspense any longer, great detective! Which of us is this supposed master criminal?"

And Gideon Parrot answered, "You are."

Legorian started to rise.

"You and you, and you, and you—in fact, all four of you together are Sigmund Llama."

We'd had the police waiting in the bedroom, and when Andor went for his gun they stormed in, quickly overpowering any resistance. Cedric Lane demanded a lawyer, but the others remained silent. Perhaps they realized this was the end of the road.

"Five clues," Gideon repeated when they were handcuffed and about to be taken away. "First, the clue of the five faces. We knew Llama assumed a different identity in each of five cities. What easier way than if he was really five people?"

"But there are only four!" I protested.

"Which brings us to the second clue—the clue of the European schedules. Before he died Quirk told me he'd checked your European trips. None of you was in the proper cities every time Llama was supposed to have been there—and specifically you were all here in New York when Llama was in Paris last summer. I happen to know about Llama's Paris appearance because I thought I had trapped him there. I was convinced he died in a plane crash until he reappeared elsewhere—more evidence that he was more than one person, and that the fifth Llama really did die in that plane crash as I suspected."

"But who was he?" I asked.

"I rather suspect he was Hal Andor's brother, who died in France last year, supposedly from a heart attack. Third was the clue of the telephone voices. Quirk had spoken with Llama several times on the phone, but Llama always sounded different. Why? Because he *was* different!"

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"We should have killed you instead of Quirk!" Cedric Lane spat out.

"Fourth, the clue of the four addresses. We phoned you all this noon and gave you four different addresses on Bank Street where Quirk was supposedly hiding. They were 208, 210, 214, and 216. He was really at 212, and that's where you sent your hit man to kill him. I was foolish to bracket the real address like that—but you couldn't have realized what I'd done unless all four of you got together and compared messages."

"You said there were five clues," I reminded him.

"Ah, yes. The fifth is the clue of the initials. I should have realized it from the beginning. Llama has five letters in it, just as this master criminal had five faces. You chose that name because it combined all of your initials. L-L-A-M-A for Lane, Legorian, Andor, Matters, and Andor's dead brother."

That was enough for the detective in charge. "Take them away," he ordered. "It looks as if Sigmund Llama's drug empire is collapsing. Once word of their arrest gets out I'm sure there'll be plenty of two-bit pushers willing to testify against them in return for lighter sentences. We owe you a great deal, Sir Gideon."

"I was only doing my job," he answered.

"My hat's off to you. You're one of the great detectives of all time!"

Sir Gideon Parrot merely smiled. "And these days there aren't many of us left."

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a *NEW* crime story by

E. X. FERRARS

first publication in the United States

When the danger to her became even more acute, Frances Liley found she could plan and act quickly, and decisively. But it wasn't until she entered the bedroom that she fully realized the horror of the situation . . .

INSTRUMENT OF JUSTICE

by E. X. FERRARS

When Frances Liley read in the obituary column of the *Times* of the death of Oliver Darnell, beloved husband of Julia, suddenly at his home, she folded her arms on the table before her, put her head down on them, and burst into violent tears. Anyone who had seen her then would have assumed that she was weeping at the loss of a dear friend. In fact, they were tears of relief, healing and wonderful. At last she was free. No threat hung over her any more. Or so she thought until she had time to do a little more thinking.

As soon as she had, she sat back abruptly, dried her eyes, and sat staring before her, a dark, angularly handsome woman of forty, possessed by a new terror. For when a person died his solicitor or his executors or someone would have to go through his papers and somewhere they would find those terrible photographs. And God knew what would happen then. At least with Oliver, Frances had known where she stood. Two thousand a year to him, which had not been too difficult for her to find, and she had been relatively safe.

But if someone else found the photographs and felt inclined to send them to Mark, her husband, he would immediately go ahead

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with the divorce that he wanted and would certainly get custody of their two children. That would be intolerable. She must think and think fast.

Luckily she had always had a quick brain. After only a few minutes she knew what to do, or at least what was worth trying. Telephoning Julia Darnell, she said, "It's Frances, Julia. I've just seen the news about Oliver. I'm so terribly sorry. I can hardly believe it. It was his heart, was it? There was always something the matter with it, wasn't there? Listen, my dear, please be quite honest with me, but would you like me to come down? I mean, if you're alone now and I can help in any way. But don't say you'd like me to come if you'd sooner I didn't. Of course I'll come to the funeral, but I could come straightaway and stay on for a few days, unless you've some other friend with you."

Julia was tearfully grateful. She had no relatives of her own and had never liked Oliver's, and though the neighbors, she said, had been very kind, she was virtually alone. And she and Frances were such very old friends, she could think of no one who could help so much to break the dreadful new loneliness of bereavement.

Of course Julia had never known of her husband's brief adultery with Frances, or that he had supplemented his not very large income as a painter of very abstract pictures with a sideline in blackmail; so her affection for Frances was uncomplicated and sincere.

Promising to arrive that afternoon, Frances then telephoned Mark in his office to tell him what had happened and that she would probably be away for a few days. The children were no problem, because they were away at their boarding school. Packing a suitcase, she set off for the Darnells' cottage in Dorset.

By that time she had a plan of sorts in her mind. On the morning of the funeral she intended to wake up with what she would claim was a virus and say that she was feeling too ill to go out. Then, during the one time when she could be certain the cottage would be empty, she would make a swift search of it for the photographs. The probability was that they were somewhere in Oliver's studio, a very private place in which Julia had never been allowed to touch anything, even to do a little cautious dusting. If they were not there, if for instance Oliver had kept them in a bank vault, then there was nothing Frances could do but go home and wait for the worst to happen; but with luck, she thought, she would find them.

Unfortunately her plan was wrecked by the fact that on the morning of the funeral it was Julia who woke up with a virus. She had

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a temperature of 102, complained of a sore throat, and could only speak in a husky whisper. Frances called the doctor who gave Julia an antibiotic and said that she must certainly stay in bed and not go out into the chill of the February morning, even to attend her husband's funeral. Julia, with bright spots of fever on her plump, naturally pale cheeks, cried bitterly and said, "But all those people coming back here to lunch, Frances—what *am* I to do about them? I can't possibly put them off now."

For Julia had insisted that Oliver's relations, who were coming from a distance, and such neighbors as were kind enough to come to the funeral, must be given lunch in her house after it, and she and Frances had spent most of the previous day assembling cold meats, salads, cheeses, and a supply of rather inferior white wine for what Frances felt would be a gruesome little party, but the thought of which seemed to comfort Julia.

Again thinking fast, Frances said, "Don't worry, I'll look after them for you. I'll go to the service, but I won't go on to the cemetery. I'll come straight back from the church and have everything ready when they arrive. Now just stay quiet and I'll look after everything."

She gave Julia the pills the doctor had left for her and also brought her a mug of hot milk into which she had emptied two capsules of sodium amytal which she had found in the bathroom cabinet. They would almost certainly insure that Julia would be asleep by the time Frances returned from the church, and though she would not have as long for her search as she had hoped, she might still be fortunate.

There were not many people in the church. A man sitting next to Frances, who started a low-voiced conversation with her before the coffin had been brought in or the vicar had appeared, introduced himself as Major Sowerby and said that his wife was desperately sorry not to be able to attend, but she was in bed with a virus.

"There's a terrible lot of it around in the village," he said. "Is it true poor Mrs. Darnell's laid up with it too?"

"I'm afraid so," Frances said.

"Tragic for her. Most upsetting. She and Oliver were so devoted to each other. Of course I didn't understand his painting, but Isobel, my wife, who knows a lot more about that sort of thing than I do, says he deserved much more recognition than he ever got. Great dedication, she says, and such integrity."

"Oh, complete," Frances agreed with a sweet sad smile, and thought that in its way it was true. Oliver had been dedicated to

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exploiting any woman who had been fool enough to be charmed by his astonishing good looks and to trust him.

As soon as the service was over she hurried out of the church, leaving the other mourners to go on to the cemetery, and made her way along the lane that led to the Darnells' cottage.

As she entered it she stood still, listening. All was quiet. So it looked as if the sodium amytal had done its work and Julia was asleep. But just to make sure, Frances went to the foot of the stairs and called softly, "Julia!"

There was no reply. She waited for a few moments, then wrenched off her coat, dropped it on a chair, and went swiftly along the passage to Oliver's studio. Presently she would have to set out the lunch for Julia's guests, but the search for the photographs must come first. Opening the door of the studio, she went in and only then understood the reason for the quiet in the house. Julia, in her dressing gown, was lying in the middle of the floor with her head a terrible mass of blood and with a heavy hammer on the floor beside her.

Frances was not an entirely hard-hearted person. Also, she was by nature law-abiding. Her first impulse, as she stared at the battered thing on the floor, was to call the police. But then a habit of having second thoughts asserted itself. It was still of desperate importance to her to find the photographs and once the police were in the house she would have no further chance to search for them.

That made the situation exceedingly complex. For one thing, how were the police to know that it had not been Frances whom Julia, drugged and half asleep, had heard in her husband's studio, and coming downstairs to investigate, had been killed by her for it? If Frances called the police now, she thought, she might find herself in deep trouble.

But if she did not call the police and searched for the photographs first, she would presently find herself with a cooling body on her hands and sooner or later would have to explain why she had failed to report it a few hours earlier. It did not help that she was almost certain she knew who the murderer was. A virus can be a very convenient thing, and Mrs. Sowerby, who had not attended the church, could not have found out that Julia was ill and would have assumed that the house was empty.

Looking round the studio, where drawers had been pulled out and papers, letters, sketches, and notebooks had been spilled on the floor, Frances wondered if the woman had found the photographs or letters that Oliver had presumably been holding over her before she com-

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mitted murder, or if she was still in terror that someone else would find them. But even if she were, she was unlikely to come back for the present, knowing that a dozen guests would shortly be arriving. Taking the key out of the door, locking it on the outside, and putting the key into the pocket of the suit she was wearing, Frances went out to the kitchen to prepare the lunch.

She took all the things that she and Julia had made the day before out of the refrigerator, spooned the various salads, the prawns with rice and peppers, the cucumbers in sour cream, the cole slaw and the rest, into cut-glass bowls, arranged the slices of cold turkey, meat loaf, and ham on dishes, and set them out on the table in the dining room. She put silver and wine glasses on the table and drew the corks of several bottles of wine. The meal was only just ready when the first guests arrived.

They were the vicar, Arthur Craddock, and his wife. He was a slender, quiet-looking man whose voice, as he recited the psalms that Julia had chosen and described Oliver's improbable virtues, had seemed unexpectedly vibrant and authoritative. But any authority he might achieve when he was performing his professional duties was sadly diminished, in a mere social setting, by his wife, a large hearty woman who looked kindly, but accustomed to domination and who upset Frances at once by saying that she would just pop upstairs to have a few words with poor Julia, tell her how splendidly everything had gone off, and how much she had been missed.

"But the infection," Frances stammered. "I believe it's all round the village and I know she wouldn't want you to be exposed to it here."

"I'm never ill," Mrs. Craddock replied. "Ask my husband. We were in India for a time, you know, and I've nursed patients through plague and never a whit the worse. I'm sure I could give Julia a little comfort."

"Well, later perhaps," Frances said, recovering her presence of mind. "I went up to see her myself a few minutes ago and found her asleep. The doctor gave her a sedative. He said rest was what she needed, and I'm sure he's right. I know she hasn't slept properly for days. But she's looking very peaceful now, so I don't think we should disturb her."

"Ah, no, of course not," Mrs. Craddock agreed. "Was that Dr. Bolling? Excellent man. The best type of good old-fashioned family doctor whom you can really trust."

She let herself and her husband be shepherded into the dining

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room and they had each just accepted a glass of wine when the doorbell rang again and Frances left them to admit the next guests.

They were a brother and a cousin of Oliver's, both of whom, he had once told Frances, he knew disliked him. The next to arrive was Major Sowerby and gradually the dining room filled up; the hushed tones in which everyone spoke on first arriving rose by degrees until the noise in the room resembled that of any ordinary cocktail party. The food on the table was eaten with appetite, the wine was drunk, and the atmosphere became one of what seemed to Frances a faintly gruesome hilarity, quelled only now and again by guilt when someone was tactless enough to remind the others that these were funeral baked meats they were consuming.

Slightly flushed, Oliver's brother remarked, "Julia was always a jolly good cook. Pity she can't be with us now."

"She must have taken a great deal of trouble over this," Mrs. Craddock said, "but I expect it was good for her, taking her mind off her sorrow. I'd like to take a little of it up to her and tell her how we've all been thinking of her, because with all the noise we've been making I'm sure she must be awake by now. I'll just pop up with a plateful, shall I, and perhaps a glass of wine?"

"That's the ticket," Major Sowerby said, "though whisky might do her more good. I took a good strong whisky up to my wife before I left for the church, and a sandwich. She said a sandwich was all she could face. Actually I had to insist on her staying in bed, she was so upset at not being able to attend the funeral, but obviously she wasn't fit to go out. The fact is, you know, she thought a lot of Oliver. Sat for her portrait once, then made me buy the thing. Well, I didn't mind doing it really, because no one could guess it's Isobel. It's all squares and triangles and she says it's good and she knows far more about that sort of thing than I do."

Mrs. Craddock was spooning prawns and rice onto a plate, murmuring, "I wonder if she likes cucumber—it disagrees with some people," adding a slice of turkey, a small piece of ham, and reaching for a bottle of wine to fill a glass for Julia.

Frightened beyond words and desperate, Frances snatched the plate and the glass from the woman's hands and said brusquely, "I'll take them," made for the door and while Mrs. Craddock was still only looking startled at her rudeness, shot up the stairs and through the door into Julia's bedroom.

In the bedroom's silence she first began to feel the real horror of the situation. Here she was with food and wine in her hands for a

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woman who lay in a room downstairs with her body cooling and her head battered in. Her gaze held hypnotized by the sight of the empty bed with its dented pillows and its blanket thrown back, Frances gulped down the wine, wishing that it was something stronger, then went downstairs again and put down the plate of untouched food on the dining table.

"She drank the wine, but she wouldn't eat anything," she said to Mrs. Craddock. "I gave her another of the pills the doctor left for her. She's very sleepy. I really think it's best to leave her alone."

Frustrated in her desire to do good, the vicar's wife soon left, sweeping her husband along with her, and after that, one by one, the other guests departed. At last the house was empty and quiet again.

Too quiet, too desolate. The last hour had been the worst nightmare that Frances had ever lived through, but at least the crowd of chattering people had been a defense against thought. Now she could not escape from it any longer. There was the problem of the photographs and the problem of the corpse in the studio. Looking at the table littered with china, wine glasses, and leftovers, she had an absurd idea that she might do the washing up before trying to cope with the murder; but recognizing this for the idiocy it was, and that her motive was only to put off doing what she must, she poured out a glass of whisky, sat down at the head of the table, and tried to concentrate.

The photographs must come first. She must nerve herself to go back into the studio and search for them. What she did next would depend on whether or not she found them. She could hardly bear to face the possibility that she might not. With the dreadful things in his hands, Mark would certainly be able to obtain custody of the children when he went ahead with the divorce, and she would never submit to that. For apart from the pleasure she took in the two dear girls, it would be intolerable to let Mark triumph over her.

She thought of the photographs, of which Oliver had only once allowed her a glimpse, of how appallingly revealing they were, and of the bitter amusement with which Mark would view them. They were, in their way, superb photographs. Oliver might not have been an outstanding painter, but as a photographer he had been highly skilled, as well as incredibly ingenious. She had had no suspicion of the presence of the camera in the room at the time he had taken the pictures, and when he had told her how he had done it she had almost laughed, it had been so clever. But now she must get them

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back. Yes, that was what she must do before she thought of anything else.

She went back into the studio. It was easier than she had thought it would be to disregard Julia's body, the darkening blood, and the murderous hammer. Locking the door in case anyone—that well-meaning busybody, Mrs. Craddock, for instance—should think of coming back, she began a methodical search of the drawers and closets. To her surprise she found the photographs almost at once, not merely prints, but the negatives too, in a box in a closet which she thought had not yet been opened by the previous searcher.

She found several other photographs of a similar character. Feeling dizzy with relief, close to bursting into tears as she had when she had first read of Oliver's death, she studied these, which were of three women, and wondered which of them was of Isobel Sowerby. Frances knew nothing about her except that her husband did not think she looked as if she consisted of squares and triangles. But none of the women did. They all had more curves than angles. And two of them looked rather young to be married to Major Sowerby, though that was not the sort of thing about which it was ever possible to be sure. Men of sixty sometimes married girls in their teens.

However, Frances thought that Julia's murderess was probably the third woman, who was about her own age, big, heavy-breasted, rather plump, with a look of passion and violence about her. In fact, a formidable-looking woman, surely capable of murder. After studying her face for some minutes, Frances put the photographs of the third woman, prints and negatives, back into the closet, took those of herself and the two younger women to the sitting room, placed them in the hearth, and set fire to them.

The negatives spat, blazed briefly, and disappeared, making a pungent smell in the room. The prints curled at the edges and caught fire more slowly; but as she prodded them with the poker, they flared up, then smoldered into ashes. Watching them, sitting on her heels, she waited until there was not a spark left, then stood up and went to the telephone.

She had a plan now. It was a gamble, but then what could she do that was not? Picking up the directory, she looked up the Sowerbys' number and dialed it.

To her satisfaction it was a woman's voice that answered. Frances did not introduce herself.

"I've found what you were looking for," she said softly.

There was a silence. Frances suddenly became aware of how her

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heart was thudding. For this was the moment when she would discover whether or not her gamble would pay off. She might have guessed totally wrong. Mrs. Sowerby might be an innocent woman who had been in bed all day with the flu, feeling very ill, and if that were so, Frances would have to start thinking all over again.

It seemed to her lunacy now that she had not called the police as soon as she had found Julia's body. If only she had known how simple it was going to be to find the photographs, she would have done so, and would have had plenty of time to destroy them before the police arrived. But there was not much point in thinking along those lines now. It was too late. She waited.

At last an almost whispering voice said in her ear, "Who are you?"

Frances drew a shuddering breath. So she had been right. Her plan was working.

"A friend of Julia's," she said. "I think you'd better come here as soon as possible."

"What do you want?" the voice asked.

"Your help," Frances said.

"I can't come. I'm ill."

"I think it would be advisable for you to make a quick recovery."

"But I can't. My husband wouldn't hear of my going out."

"That's your problem. I'll wait here for a little while, but not for long."

There was another silence, then the voice said, "All right, I'll see what I can do."

The telephone at the other end was put down. Frances cradled the one that she was holding, realizing that the hand that had been gripping it was clammy with sweat and had left damp marks on the instrument. She wondered if that mattered, but decided that it did not. She would have another call to make presently, which would account for her fingerprints.

She waited an hour before there was a ring at the front doorbell. The early dusk of the February afternoon was already dimming the daylight. She had spent some of the time while she had had to wait stripping Julia's body of the dressing gown and nightdress that she was wearing and redressing it in pants and bra, jeans and sweater. It had been a terrible undertaking. In the middle of it she had felt faint and had had to go back to the sitting room to give herself a chance to recover her self-control. But she had been afraid to wait until the other woman arrived and could help her in case the body

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stiffened too much to make the undressing and redressing possible. She knew nothing about how long it took for *rigor mortis* to set in.

The bloodstained clothes that she removed were a problem and so was the hammer. She had not thought about that until after she had started undressing Julia; but in the end she made a bundle of them, took them out to the garage, and put them into the trunk of the Darnells' car. Then she went back into the house to wait.

When the ring at the door came at last and she went to answer it, she found the woman whom she had been expecting on the doorstep. Her guess about the photographs had been correct. Isobel Sowerby was a middle-aged woman, tall and heavy-set, with thick dark hair to her shoulders, intense dark eyes, and jutting lips. She was wearing slacks and a sheepskin jacket.

Staring at Frances with deep enmity, she said, "What am I supposed to do now?"

"We're going to arrange a suicide," Frances answered.

"I don't understand," the other woman said. "If you know so much, why haven't you turned me in?"

"Because I'm involved myself. I made the mistake of not calling the police as soon as I found the body. I wanted to find some photographs of me that Oliver had and I didn't think until it was too late how difficult it was going to be to explain how I'd managed not to find Julia as soon as I got back from the church. So I'm in almost as much trouble as you are. And I think the best thing for both of us to do is to put Julia into her car and send her over the cliffs into the sea. Suicide while the balance of her mind was disturbed by the death of her husband. I couldn't arrange it alone because she's too heavy for me to carry. I had to have help."

"All right, whatever you say," Isobel Sowerby said. "But give me the photographs first."

"Afterwards," Frances said.

"No, now, or I won't help you."

"Afterwards," Frances repeated.

They looked at one another with wary antagonism, then Isobel Sowerby shrugged.

"Let's get on with it then," she said. "I persuaded my husband to go to the golf club to get over the funeral, and he'll stay there for a time and have a few drinks, but he'll be home presently and it won't help us to have him asking me questions."

"How did you get into the house this morning?" Frances asked. "I've been wondering about that."

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"The back door was unlocked, as I knew it would be. We aren't particular about locking up round here."

"And you left in a hurry when you heard me come in."

"Yes. Now let's get on."

It was almost dark by then and the garage doors could not be seen from the lane outside. There was no one to see them as they carried Julia's body from the house to the car, put it in the seat beside the driver's, covered it with a rug, got into the car themselves, and with Isobel Sowerby driving, since she knew the roads, started toward the coast. She drove cautiously along the twisting lanes until at last they reached the top of the cliff and saw the dark chasm of the sea ahead of them.

Stopping the car close to the edge of the cliff, the two got out and between them moved Julia's body into the driver's seat. After that it was only a case of turning on the engine again, putting the car into low gear, slamming the doors, and standing back while it went slowly forward to the brink, seemed to teeter there for an instant, then went plunging down; the sound of the crash when the car hit the rocks below carried up to them with a loudness which, it seemed to Frances, could be heard for miles.

But afterward there was no sign that anyone else had heard it. The darkness around them was silent. They started the long walk back.

They did not talk to one another as they walked and had reached the Darnells' cottage before Isobel Sowerby said, "I don't know what I'm going to say to my husband. He'll have got back from the golf club long ago."

"You'll think of something," Frances said. She didn't believe that Major Sowerby would be difficult to delude. "You could always say you've been wandering around in a state of delirium."

"Which is what I think I have been doing," Isobel Sowerby said. "Now give me the photographs."

Frances took her into the sitting room and showed her the heap of ashes in the grate.

"I burned them."

Isobel Sowerby stared at them incredulously, then broke suddenly into hysterical laughter.

"What a fool I am!" she cried. "I've always been a fool. I needn't have come at all!"

"But I needed your help, so naturally I wasn't going to tell you that I burned them," Frances replied.

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"Are those really my photographs? You really destroyed them?"

"Along with some of my own. I'd get home now as soon as I could if I were you, because I'm going to telephone the police and tell them Julia's missing."

Still laughing, Isobel Sowerby turned and hurried out into the darkness.

Frances went to the telephone, called the police, and told them that she was very concerned because she had just discovered that Mrs. Darnell, who was suffering from a high fever and was in a state of shock after the death of her husband, had disappeared. Her car was missing too. Frances said that she had only just discovered this, because after the lunch that had been held in the house after the funeral, she had felt so tired that she had gone to her room to lie down and had fallen asleep and had only just awakened, gone into Mrs. Darnell's room to see how she was, and found it empty.

She said that she knew Mrs. Darnell had been in her room at about half-past one, when she had taken some food and wine up to her, and Mrs. Darnell had drunk a little wine but had refused the food. But at what time she had got up and left, Frances had no idea, because she had been so sound asleep. She had heard nothing. Anything might have happened in the house without her being aware of it.

The man who answered her call said that someone would be out to see her shortly. Putting the telephone down, Frances found a dustpan and brush, swept up the ashes in the grate, and flushed them down the lavatory. Then, feeling as tired as she had told the policeman she had felt earlier, she began to clear up the dining room and had started on the washing up when the police arrived.

After that everything went surprisingly smoothly. The police soon found the wreck of the car on the rocks at the foot of the cliffs, and the hammer and the bloodstained nightdress and dressing gown in the trunk. They also found fingerprints on the steering wheel which were later identified as Mrs. Sowerby's and they found some highly obscene photographs of her in a closet in Oliver Darnell's studio.

It had happened too that Major Sowerby, in a state of great anxiety at finding his wife missing when he returned from the golf club, had telephoned several friends to ask if she was with them; so without intending it, he had destroyed any chance that she might have had of concocting an alibi. Mrs. Sowerby told an absurd story about having been summoned by Mrs. Liley to help her get rid of the body of Julia Darnell, whom Mrs. Liley and not Mrs. Sowerby had mur-

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dered, but the story was not believed. There was a little doubt as to whether she could have handled the body by herself, but she was a big powerful woman and it was thought that she could and she was charged with the murder.

Frances stayed on in the Darnells' cottage until after the inquest; then when her presence was no longer required, she telephoned Mark and started for home.

As she drove, she fell into one of her rare moods of self-examination. She was not a nice person, she thought. Some people might even say that she was rather horrible. She did not really blame Mark for wanting to leave her and marry that little pudding of a woman who had been infatuated with him for the last five years. And if only he would give up his claim to the children, Frances would be quite willing to let him go. But the children were the only people for whom she had ever felt any deep and lasting love. Or what she took to be love.

It did not involve questioning whether it would be better for them to stay with her or with Mark, or which of their parents the girls themselves loved more. Even in her present mood of introspection, she did not ask herself that. She simply knew that they were hers, a possession from which it would be intolerable to be parted.

And horrible as perhaps she was, was she not an instrument of justice? Had she not arranged the arrest of Julia's murderess, without herself or those two foolish young women, whose photographs she had good-naturedly burned, becoming involved? No mud would stick to any of them. None of it would splash devastatingly onto the children. Only the guilty would suffer. So why would anyone criticize her?

In a state of quiet satisfaction she drove homeward to Mark.

"Q"

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a *NEW* detective character by

RALEIGH BOND

We haven't mentioned it, but we've wondered for some time now why, in this era of Women's Liberation, there haven't been more new women detectives. (You would think we'd have dozens!) Well, here is the first new lady sleuth to appear in EQMM in almost an era. Meet Athalia Goode, sole owner and operative of Best Detective Agency, and her historian-husband who is positively not a partner-in-criminology. . .

MEET ATHALIA GOODE

by RALEIGH BOND

I was almost finished with the Battle of Fort Henry when the messenger came in. He held a large manila envelope and looked at me tentatively until I stopped typing.

"Best?" he asked.

"No. Goode," I answered and jabbed my thumb toward the stairs. "Best is up a flight."

He stood there a moment, checking the address on the envelope and listening to the clacking of my machine. As he was going up I pushed a button under my desk to alert Athalia that something was headed her way. She must have been expecting it because no light went on over the intercom box. So I kept typing.

The "Best" referred to is Best Detective Agency, owned and operated exclusively by my wife, with no help, hindrance or interest from me. Athalia's been in her line quite a long time and listens politely to my suggestions, but she's under no obligation to follow them. Neither would I be under obligation to do more than listen if she stuck her nose into my business.

After all, what could we add to each other's work? My books on

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American history always do well in the mass market and the name Byron Goode is greeted with some respect even in academic circles, circles which I don't frequent.

Even as a kid I loved the more popular books on the subject and all during my years as a newspaper reporter I planned writing the definitive, yet entertaining study on a number of eras and wars. I finally did, much to my colleagues' amazement, calling my epic *The Call of Battle*, being the first really dramatic and in-depth recreation since Kenneth Roberts of Arnold's March to Quebec. I only mention this because I want you to know I was at work on it long before I met Athalia.

She doesn't claim I'm responsible for her success either, since we came together while I was covering a murder case in New York for my paper and she was involved in the investigation on behalf of an insurance company. Before that she worked as an operator for various detective agencies and for a brief while was connected with the federal government as an investigator for a Senator. So we were both on the path of our careers even before we fell in love and got married.

I quit my job on the paper to devote myself fulltime to writing after the sales of *The Call of Battle* justified such a move, and she handed in her resignation to the insurance company to start her own firm, calling it Best Detective Agency because, as she quipped, it sounds better than Goode.

We decided to hit the road for California and found a small house in Los Angeles on Melrose Place, set back from the street and covered with vines and surrounded by trees for privacy. We live in the rear—the two front rooms are reserved for our offices. Since I welcome any interruption from the typewriter I took over the ground-floor room, which is bigger, and stocked it with my ponderous collection of research books and files while she went upstairs with her paraphernalia.

I don't go up there very often, finding the décor less than what I imagine a private-eye's conclave should be. There's no wooden hat-rack, no cracked plaster or empty gin bottles. While it is unmistakably a business office, the little glass statuettes and potted plants, the pastel prints and slightly pink walls, do not spell Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe by any means. Thank God I got her to fill her magazine rack with more varied fare than *Cosmopolitan* and *Ms.*, even though it means having to read my historical journals quickly before they're snatched up and taken to the upstairs land of no return.

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Anyway, being no detective I had no curiosity about what was in the envelope the messenger brought that day, except to note that the label bore the logo of the insurance company where Athalia used to work. It was probably a request for assistance which she gets from time to time from her old employers.

I knew I'd find out about it at supper because we always discuss our work day over a good meal and a bottle of wine—a sort of professional courtesy. I know she's no more interested in my current book on Grant's Tennessee Campaign than I am in who swiped what from where; but we are interested in each other. So we listen.

"It's a bank embezzlement job," she told me, dishing out her excellent chicken limone while I opened a bottle of Auslese. She likes cooking which I suppose is an even trade for my directing her clients upstairs and letting them think I'm her receptionist.

"It's three hundred thousand dollars' worth, which is small potatoes to the insurance company, so they're not sparing any top operators on it. They asked me to look into it even though the guy who did it confessed and committed suicide. Maybe."

"Maybe?"

"Well, it can be read that way," she went on, sitting at her place and sipping the wine. "There was going to be an audit at the end of the week. The day after it was announced the guy is found dead and there's a shortage in his accounts."

"Why didn't he just hop a plane for parts unknown?"

"That's also a possibility."

I sighed and looked up at her, knowing this was supposed to goad me into asking more questions. I do it myself when I see her interest waning, spouting cryptic remarks like, "I'm beginning to wonder if Stonewall Jackson wasn't gay."

"His name is Ralph Swann," she continued, taking my look for the question. "He was assistant to the manager of the Merchant's Bank in Encino, and he was found dead in his garage the night before last. In the back seat of his car were two suitcases, and it was later discovered that he had booked space on a flight to Bombay, with a stop in Paris to change planes."

"I thought you said he committed suicide . . . maybe."

"He was sitting in the driver's seat with his foot on the gas pedal. His wife had been away visiting her family for the past week and was scheduled to return that night around eleven. She was surprised when her husband didn't meet her at the airport as he had promised.

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When she got home she found a note reading 'Sorry, darling. Try to forgive me,' and a garage full of carbon monoxide."

"It doesn't make sense. If he had his bags packed, why suicide?"

"Good point," she conceded, and I felt just like a detective. "The police theory is that Swann, fearing discovery because of the audit, decided to skip the country while his wife was out of town. He writes the note, goes out to the car, becomes overcome with remorse, and asphyxiates himself."

"What do they expect you to do," I asked, "prove otherwise?"

"The insurance company couldn't care less about how he died. What they want is the missing three hundred thousand. It wasn't in Swann's suitcases, and the police haven't been able to turn it up."

Since Athalia had accepted the case it meant I would not be working on the Battle of Fort Henry the next morning. As I've said, I have the writer's longing for any excuse not to write and one of Athalia's rare exhibitions of cowardice supplies it. She is absolutely terrified of taking the driver's test. Since she never needed it in New York I could claim I'm atoning for marrying her and taking her to the automotive civilization of California, but in truth I do it because we enjoy being together.

I waited in the car, warming up the engine, while she completed a last-minute call and then came out of the house. Watching her trim figure in the smart-looking pants suit, the crisp confident stride of her walk, and as she drew nearer, the lovely intelligent eyes behind the heavy horned-rimmed glasses, I was again reminded how lucky I was. Sliding into her seat she told me one problem had been cleared up.

"It wasn't suicide. I just got the autopsy results and the cause of death was a heart attack. Swann was probably dead two seconds after he put his foot on the pedal."

"Does his wife confirm he had a bad heart?"

It turned out she did. Mrs. Swann was a washed-out woman who looked older than her years. She lived in one of those small stucco houses that make up much of Burbank with an interior someone had worked hard at to make as drab as the exterior.

"I always made sure Ralph went to the doctor regularly," she assured us through a thin whiny voice. "He had three attacks within the past two years."

I thought I sensed a tone of resentment about this, but Athalia went about her interrogation by treating Mrs. Swann with what appeared to be sincere sympathy.

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"Did you notice anything peculiar about him in the past five months? I understand that's when he was made assistant manager at the bank."

"That's true," answered Mrs. Swann. "It brought in more money but we didn't see each other as much any more. He worked far into the night at the bank, but when he was home on weekends he seemed more cheerful than usual and more helpful around the house."

"I don't want to upset you by going over the night you found him, but I understand the police have returned the suitcases he had in the car. Could I see them, please?"

Mrs. Swann led us to the bedroom where the two cases were lying on the bed. "I haven't had time to unpack them, so they're just as he left them. You can see what a messy person he was. Never folded anything right, never put things where they belonged. I always had to do everything for him."

I began to wonder why it had taken Ralph so long to fly the coop while Athalia went through the luggage. Both cases were well-worn and in the larger one she found a change of underwear, socks, and shirt, one suit practically wrapped in a ball, some shaving gear, a few handkerchiefs, and two pairs of shoes. The other one was a small carry-on case with another pair of shoes, more linen, cuff links, a set of keys, and a toothbrush.

"Those keys are for things around the house," Mrs. Swann told Athalia when she saw her examining them. "Cabinets, doors, a chest. The police tried them all out before they returned them."

We thanked Mrs. Swann and sympathized with her plight as she followed us to our car. She had by now accepted her husband's guilt and seemed to look upon it as another failing, like his messiness and cheerfulness, designed only to make her suffer.

"I've been thinking," I told Athalia as we drove out of Burbank. I paused to allow her a sarcastic rejoinder but she seemed definitely interested. "The plane trip. Isn't it a curious way to get to Bombay, via Paris? After all, it's much quicker just to head across the Pacific from California."

"Oh," she answered with a tinge of disappointment. "I don't think Swann cared where he was going, so long as he got far away and in the quickest possible time. The flight was booked around ten thirty that night, and the clerk who took the call remembered that the party asked for the first international flight out. It happened to be Paris. He was then asked for the next connection to the east

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which was Bombay, although it meant a three-hour stopover. It does prove one thing, however."

"What's that?"

"That the trip was a last-minute decision, not a premeditated plan. Which isn't odd because Swann learned of the audit only that day." She then looked out the window and said absent-mindedly, "I thought you were going to bring up something else."

We drove the rest of the way in silence.

Walter Hallward was the manager of the Merchant's Bank, but we had learned by phone that he had not come to work that day because his wife was ill; so we drove to his home in Los Feliz. It was one of those palatial affairs that smacked of old money, probably built around the time when Los Angeles was a summer resort for turn-of-the-century millionaires.

Hallward was a gray-haired man in his fifties with pouches under his eyes and over his belt. A butler brought us to his study which was richly paneled and lined with first editions and first-rate sculpture. He looked up from his desk with the expression of a harried beagle and indicated chairs, somewhat mystified by Athalia's presence. As an afterthought he half rose until she was comfortably seated and then plopped back in his chair, turning his attention to me.

"You'll have to forgive me if I seem brusque. I've just returned from a business trip this morning. On top of this situation at the bank I've also had to deal with my wife's illness."

He seemed to take it as personally as Mrs. Swann had taken Ralph's peccadillos.

"There's no doubt it was Swann who stole the money?" asked Athalia, and I noticed her back feathers ruffle a bit when Hallward directed his answer toward me.

"None. He was the only one who had access to that particular account and the faked notations are in his handwriting."

"How long had it been going on?" Athalia's voice rose slightly.

Again to me. "As far as we can tell—"

"Mrs. Goode is asking the questions," I cut in gently, picking up a magazine from a nearby table. It wasn't *Cosmopolitan*.

I didn't see his reaction, but I could feel the room temperature drop about ten degrees. Finally his voice resumed, cold and emotionless, but slightly softer since it was now directed toward Athalia.

"About four months ago. I don't mind telling you what a disappointment it is. I trusted Ralph very much. He represented the bank

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when I had to go out of town for meetings and conferences. He came here for dinner. I looked upon him as my own son—"

He was interrupted as the door opened and a servant stood there tentatively.

"Mrs. Hallward is feeling better and asked to see you, sir."

"Tell her I'm busy," he snapped. "I'll be there when I can. And make sure she stays in bed."

The servant looked somewhat shocked at this but withdrew. Whatever Hallward was busy at it certainly wasn't us because he rose and told us that if *we* had any further questions they could be answered by his secretary at the bank. We took our leave but noticed that Hallward returned to his desk, ignoring his wife's summons, and busying himself with a few papers.

"I'm probably missing the really important point again," I said after we got into the car, "but isn't that place a little too ritzy for a bank manager?"

"No. You've brought up something I agree is important. And yes, it *is* too ritzy. Being a bank manager pays quite well, but we're not exactly talking about Chase Manhattan."

Indeed we weren't, because the Merchant's Bank was a small one-story affair, shaped with all the architectural grandeur of a safety-deposit box.

Hallward's secretary, Karen Allenby, was a magnificently built blonde who towered over Athalia. Once she learned that Athalia was conducting the examination, she regarded me with the same mystification that Hallward had shown to my wife, and I got the feeling if I had asked a question she would have answered Athalia. However, she would have got the same comeuppance from her. That's the way we operate.

As it was, Miss Allenby was more interested in unburdening some long pent-up resentments and responded more eagerly than I expected when Athalia turned her inquiry from the bank books to Hallward's private life.

"Mrs. Hallward is the daughter of Addison Quincy," she informed us and I remembered that Quincy, the last president and chairman of the board of the Quincy Orange Juice Company, had passed away about three years ago. "He left her everything, an estate that ran into millions. Mr. Hallward married her against her father's objections. He thought Mr. Hallward wasn't prosperous enough for his precious little girl, even though he had risen from teller to manager of this bank in ten years' time."

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"It's odd that he still stays here. Why doesn't he enter the Quincy Company or use his wife's money to establish his own bank?"

Miss Allenby seemed to bridle at the thought. "Because he's much too fine a man to take advantage of his wife's wealth." I felt a little guilty about the five dollars I had borrowed from Athalia last weekend when I couldn't reach the bank and never paid back. "Besides," she added bitterly, "Mrs. Hallward doesn't fully control her estate. Her father knew her for what she was, a spoiled brat who never had to lift a finger for herself in her life. She used to gamble away half of her allowance and spend the rest on extravagant clothes and jewelry. He made it a stipulation in his will that she had to answer to a board of trustees for every penny, and she uses that as an excuse for begrudging her own husband any share of the estate—that is, for business purposes."

Her eyes almost filled with tears as she shook her head at the injustice of it all. "I've been with Mr. Hallward for many years. I still take care of many of his personal affairs, arrange his trips for the bank, even pick out some of his clothes. It's tragic to see a man like him kowtowing to someone like her."

I got the distinct impression that she would much prefer to be the one Hallward was kowtowing to. Athalia's interests seemed to run toward other lines.

"How did you feel about Mr. Swann?"

Miss Allenby's lips twisted in distaste. "I felt nothing about him. He was a little mouse. He was supposed to be an assistant manager but I never considered him as anything but an errand boy who just followed Mr. Hallward's orders. That is, when I, or anyone else for that matter, ever considered him at all."

After examining the doctored books Athalia spent some time drifting around the bank, chatting with employees and reading a few memos from Hallward which Miss Allenby provided.

"I think I know what you're doing," I told her on the ride home.

"What?"

"Studying Hallward's handwriting. It seems to me he could use three hundred thousand dollars as much as Swann. Maybe to buy Miss Allenby some new clothes."

"So why did Swann pack his bags when the audit was announced?"

"The errand-boy type, remember? Following orders from Hallward. He would take the rap and Hallward would make it up to him later, after knocking off the missus and getting all that orange-juice money for himself. How's that for detecting?"

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She didn't answer. In fact, she didn't say much all evening, even at supper. I tried to bring her out of it in my usual way, by being so boring about my own field that she'd start talking about hers in desperation.

"I'm moving on to the Battle of Fort Donelson now. That was much more interesting than Fort Henry. For instance, after the Confederate soldiers attacked Grant he noticed a lot of them had food in their knapsacks. He couldn't figure out why soldiers should carry food into battle and then realized it meant they weren't attacking him out of strength. They were trying to escape the fort and needed the rations once they got away. From then on he knew how weak the enemy was, pressed the siege, and won."

Even this bit of deductive reasoning failed to bring her out of her mood and she spent rest of the evening playing her electric organ, which someone had once given her as a fee.

The next morning I was relating Grant's victory to my typewriter when Hallward appeared at our front door. He seemed even more out of sorts than before and I wondered how Athalia had managed to get him to come over, but all the while I was feeling elation at my own victory. So I had been right after all.

He informed me he had an appointment with my "employer," and I told him I had been so busy making coffee for the office I hadn't had time to check my calendar. I made him wait ten minutes out of pure cussedness and then told him he could go upstairs. As he went I buzzed Athalia and then noticed that the intercom light came on. That meant she wanted me to listen in on their conversation, but it also meant that if I went on typing it would be heard in her office. I sat there patiently, listening to her door open and close.

"Mrs. Goode, I got your message. Do you really know where the three hundred thousand dollars is hidden?"

"That's right, Mr. Hallward. Please sit down." There was the sound of leather creaking and then Athalia went on, "First of all, there's no doubt that Mr. Swann took the money."

"I didn't know there *was* any doubt."

"Maybe not in *your* mind."

I settled back in my chair, wondering if that was why she wanted me to keep the intercom open.

"However, there is some doubt concerning Mr. Swann's supposed flight to escape capture."

"Supposed?"

"Yes. I felt there was something wrong about it the moment I

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examined the contents of his suitcases. Certain things did not seem right. I didn't realize they were all pointing to the fact that Mr. Swann was not planning to leave the country at all. Then it all began to fit in last night during a very perceptive illustration from history concerning what someone would take with him during an escape." So I had been of some use after all. "For instance, keys."

"Keys?"

"Mr. Hallward, if you were planning to quit your old life entirely and make for parts unknown forever, would you even think of packing your house keys?" She paused but there was no reply. "Or put in two suits and not include a single tie?"

"The man was in a panic. He didn't have time to think."

"He apparently had enough presence of mind to make plane reservations, with a stopover in Paris after a long trans-Atlantic flight, and the prospect of many more hours in the air before he reached Bombay. I'm sure you've traveled to Europe, Mr. Hallward. Tell me, would you be inclined to pack your shaving gear in the luggage that you would check and not see again until you reached your final destination; or would you include it with the hand luggage you carry on board yourself? Didn't Swann consider how he would look when he hit Paris or Bombay after all those hours in the air and waiting in the airport? His wife said he was messy and yet he remembered to put his toothbrush within reach."

"Where does all this get us?"

"To the simple fact that Swann did not pack those bags and therefore never intended to escape. But someone wanted to make it look as if he did. Who?"

"Are you saying that I—?"

"No. No man would pack another man's bags and forget his ties or lock up his shaving gear. No man would crumple another man's suit into a ball or put such a stock in having three extra pairs of shoes. Suits, even to the most careless man, are still the main article of wear and treated accordingly. And a variety of shoes is not as important to men as they are to women. Swann's bags were obviously packed by a woman, but by a woman who had never packed a man's suitcase before."

There was another sound of creaking leather indicating that Hallward was shifting in his chair. Then Athalia went on.

"Now, that eliminates Mrs. Swann. Even if she came home earlier than she admitted, found Swann dead from a heart attack, and devised the idea of making it look like an escape attempt, she de-

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plored her husband's messiness and probably always packed when he went off on a trip, which was fairly often if the worn condition of the bags is any indication. She would have remembered his ties, put his shaving gear within easy reach, folded his suit, and given him extra socks rather than extra shoes.

"As for Miss Allenby, even though she's single most executive secretaries learn masculine needs in a hurry—luggagewise, that is. They're almost as knowing as wives, and she told us she takes care of your trips often, which I believe is more than your wife does."

There was another pause and I thought I heard heavy breathing.

"I've heard that your wife has been surrounded by wealth all her life which means she's had servants to do her every task. That sort of person wouldn't know that shaving gear is more important to a man during a long trip than cuff links. To her that would represent jewelry which must be kept near at hand along with a toothbrush. But ties? Would she consider ties while packing a bag? She who always had everything done for her."

"What would my wife have to do with someone like Swann?"

"It wasn't Swann, but the three hundred thousand dollars he could get for her. Oh, I know she has millions but every dollar she spent had to be accounted for, so she might as well have been poor, or as dependent as some wives are on their husbands for an allowance. That can tax anyone's self-respect, Mr. Hallward. Moreover, she likes to gamble, indulge in extravagances, but is denied the use of her own money.

"Then along comes Swann whom you said you had to dinner at your home. He was a drab little man with a drab little wife, a man whom women like Miss Allenby treated with contempt. It must have thrilled him beyond words when Mrs. Hallward showed him attention. His own wife said he began to be more cheerful and even helped around the house, sure signs of guilt." I made a note not to fix the washer next time. "He was glad to supply her with money in return for the favors she gave him during those times he was supposed to be working late at the bank and you were away on trips."

"This is outrageous! How dare you—!"

"The night after he heard about the audit he called her, knowing you were again out of town. Fortunately, Mrs. Swann was also away, so he made your wife come to him, threatening to tell you everything unless she helped him make up the shortage. She had to agree and probably invited him to accompany her to your house where she could give him some jewelry to pawn. He wrote a note to his wife

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who was returning soon, apologizing for not meeting the plane. It was while he was writing it that he had his heart attack. I never wondered why there was no signature. Husbands don't usually sign notes to their wives. 'Sorry, darling. Try to forgive me.' That's the kind of thing my husband leaves me when he takes the car unexpectedly while I'm out."

I save my literary talents for my books.

"When your wife realized he was dead she got the idea of the attempted escape, to ward off any investigation that would lead to her. She called the airport and picked any plane that would make it look like a desperate flight from the law. But when she packed his bags she made nearly every error a person with her background would make, including the keys. Somehow she carried him out to the car, put him behind the wheel, started the engine, and left, hoping we would come to the conclusion that we all did come to."

"You can't prove any of this."

"I think I can. There's one weak link in all this. You realized that when you returned home and found her in hysterics. A woman who had been pampered all her life hasn't got the strength to stand alone. She told you everything and begged for help. Naturally you had to make sure she didn't talk to anyone else, so you pretended she was ill and stayed home to keep an eye on her.

"Of course you did all this because you wanted to avoid scandal, the chance you'd be held responsible by the bank and laughed at as a deceived husband. But there was another reason. Everyone whom I talked to at the bank confirmed that you had always been servile to your wife because of your position. 'Kowtowing' was what Miss Allenby called it. But you certainly didn't sound servile when we visited you that morning. You didn't have to be. You had a hold on her now and forever, which meant her wealth and position now belonged to you alone. Like men of your type, Mr. Hallward, you only know two ways of acting—as a coward or a bully."

If this guy was as Athalia described, I couldn't understand why he was just sitting there. I didn't have long to wonder.

"So," Athalia went on, "you see I do have a line of inquiry to give the police. How long do you think Mrs. Hallward will stand up to their questioning? Suppose some of her bills are checked against the money from her estate? Suppose certain gambling establishments are questioned? That's why I called you here. To see if you wanted to settle this the easy way."

The sound of his chair falling back on the floor was heard and his

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voice grew strident with fury. "Damn you! Do you think I'm going to let you ruin things for me now? When I've finally got her where I want her? Why should I show her any mercy? She and that swine cheated me behind my back! But it wasn't his fault—she made him do it! You're all alike—every one of you!"

I heard his feet stamping on the floor and he gave a vicious growl. Then there was silence. Athalia's voice came quietly over the intercom.

"Byron?"

"Yes."

"Don't turn off the tape recorder yet. Perhaps Mr. Hallward would like to say a few more words into it."

"All right," I answered and looked to heaven. So that was why she wanted me to leave the intercom open. I knew she wasn't in any danger. We have another signal to indicate she needs help, which isn't very often. We also don't have a tape recorder.

"Would you mind dialing the police for me?" Athalia said. "It's hard to do it with one hand."

The wood-scraping noise was Athalia opening her desk drawer where she kept that rust-filled automatic which neither of us ever loaded, since we both detest firearms.

I told her I'd phone and flipped off the intercom, first typing the last three letters of a word I had left unfinished.

There wasn't much in the papers about it. Of course they had enough influence to keep from being arrested, especially after Mrs. Hallward's board of trustees promised to pay back the $300,000. Even Hallward, who could have been sent up as an accessory after the fact, got off scot-free, except for the divorce which followed soon after. But I understand he and the new Mrs. Hallward (née Allenby) are reasonably happy.

There was an item on the back pages of *The New York Times* which I read while I was in New York visiting my publisher. He and some others from the office took me out to dinner in some bar-restaurant and while we were sitting in a booth I glanced at the paper and read how the Merchant's Bank was now entirely solvent after Swann's embezzlement, thanks to prompt police work and the cooperation of the insurance company. No names were mentioned, which is fair since the company pays the bills; but it does seem hard on a fellow who would like to point to the article while sitting with some guys in a bar and say proudly, "My wife did it."

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a NEW short story by

JACK RITCHIE

Who was Jack the Ripper? What was his true identity? At long last the secret is revealed . . .

The author titled this story "The Secret Smile." We thought of "Eyewitness" or "The Great Secret" or "The Man in the Hansom Cab." But there is only one perfect title . . .

A CASE OF IDENTITY

by JACK RITCHIE

I have discovered the true identity of Jack the Ripper. I now know his very name.

I saw him commit his first murder and I would, of course, have recognized him if I had ever seen him again. But it was not until a month ago that I could actually put a name to that face.

Yes, I was there that dreadful night, crouched in the darkness of a nearby doorway, not daring to move and hardly daring to breathe. If he had been aware that I had just witnessed the murder, I have no doubt at all that he would have instantly pounced upon me and slashed me to ribbons.

And so, horrified, I had watched him at his grisly work and I had done nothing. Nothing. She had died swiftly, poor woman. Yes, instantly quite beyond my help or that of anyone else. What had happened to her afterward, she could not have felt.

She had been his first victim.

What had I been doing in that district of Whitechapel at that time of night?

Even today I blush at the thought of my mission. But I had been a young subaltern gazetted for immediate service in India and I was

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due to leave England the next day. There existed the possibility that I might not see an English woman again in years.

And so I had been prowling the neighborhood in mufti, seeking companionship. I had been without success, however, for these women of the streets had all seemed so gross, so crude, that I had actually been repelled.

At last, tiring of the futile search for something which perhaps could not really be found, I had stepped into a doorway to light a cigar.

I was searching my pockets for a match, when I saw the woman coming up the alleyway. I retreated into the shadows, not wishing for any further contact with these creatures, and waited for her to pass.

As she did so, another figure appeared at the end of the short lane. The woman stopped when she reached him and they exchanged a few words, of which I could make out only a murmur. And then suddenly his arm raised and the knife flashed. She had no time even to scream. And then the Ripper went to work over the body.

I do possess a certain physical courage. I have since even been mentioned in dispatches. This, however, was quite a different matter. So sudden. So shocking. So horrible that I had been literally frozen to the spot.

No, I could never forget that man's face, so ghastly pale in the shaft of moonlight. Those mad eyes.

I had watched him finish his terrible deed, and after he had disappeared into the darkness of the night, I too fled the scene.

My first natural impulse had been to find a policeman immediately, but as I hurried through the streets, I began to wonder if that was at all wise.

What good would the police be to the poor woman now?

And if I reported the murder, I would be questioned. Yes, surely at least that. The police would want to know what I had been doing in the neighbourhood at that time of night.

And how would I answer them? With a lie? With the truth?

I had been reared by a family of the highest moral principles. I was a favourite son of whom much was expected, both in my immediate behaviour and in my future career.

Yes, I would be asked questions and I would have to provide the police with answers. If I tried to be evasive, to tell lies, perhaps they might even suspect *me* of the crime.

What purpose would it really serve for me to go to the police? I

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could provide them with a description of the killer, yes. But it could fit thousands of men in this London of 4,000,000 souls.

Perhaps *if* the murderer was ever picked up by the police, *then* I might come forward to identify him. But why should I reveal myself now when it might serve no purpose at all except to ruin me?

I saw a constable ahead. I nodded to him as we passed and continued on to my hotel.

The next morning, I was off on a packet to India.

It was on that sub-continent that I learned from weeks-old newspapers that the atrocity I had witnessed had been but the first in a series of murders and mutilations, and that the murderer continued to remain at large, leaving the police completely baffled.

Would it have made any difference if I had known at the time of the first murder that there would be others? Would I have gone to the police regardless of the risk to my own future? I do not know.

I had been appalled to learn of the subsequent crimes, of course. Yet I had reasoned what possible good could I, in India, do if I came forward now with no more than a general description of the murderer? And if the truth came out that I had stood cowering in that doorway, I would certainly be forced to resign my commission.

So once again I yielded to expediency and remained silent.

There were wild rumours as to the identity of Jack the Ripper. It was suggested that he might be a man of some medical knowledge. Others advanced the theory that he might even be of royal blood.

That he was a man of literacy had been obvious in the taunting letters he had written to the authorities. He was certainly not some illiterate madman of the slums.

If the police had actually arrested a suspect and brought him to trial, would I finally have come forward to confirm his guilt? Or his innocence? I do not even dare think about that.

But then the killings stopped.

I was enormously relieved, of course. And along with millions of others I wondered why. Had the Ripper himself died? Perhaps even by his own hand? Had he been committed to some madhouse by people who did not even know that he was Jack the Ripper?

We, in this latter half of the Nineteenth Century, are just beginning to uncover the dark impulses of the mind which compel a man to do the things he does. Was it even possible that Jack had suddenly, startlingly, wakened to the enormity of his crimes? Was he now hiding somewhere, a torn wretched man fighting madness and remorse?

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Yes, these were my speculations as the months passed. Years. And I, as much as possible, tried to keep the thought of Jack the Ripper out of my mind.

It was an exciting life for a young officer on the frontier, and yet there were also long periods of utter boredom which I spent lolling about in my quarters reading well-worn and dated issues of newspapers and magazines from England.

I was particularly attracted to the issues of one magazine, *The Strand*. I read the articles, the tales, the adventures, with a fascination that surprised me. It was some time before I realised that it was not the stories themselves which drew me to the pages, it was the illustrations.

I suppose that if the magazine had been illustrated with photographs, I would instantly have realised what it was that so commanded my attention. But they were line drawings. And the artist, capable and talented though he might be, had not quite succeeded in creating true and exact representations. But there were clues here and there in some of the drawings, and they seemed to converge until one day I found myself staring with astonishment and horror at the very features of Jack the Ripper himself.

At first I wondered if my eyes and my mind were playing tricks upon me. Was it possible that my obsession with Jack, spurred by my feelings of guilt, had somehow transferred itself to the pages of the magazine?

This man, this Jack the Ripper, bore a name which was more than well-known in the English-speaking world.

I studied and re-studied dozens of the illustrations and slowly some doubt crept into my mind. Was this man *really* Jack the Ripper? Or was I going mad?

I had to find out. I had to *see* this man again before I could be certain.

I applied for leave long due me and sailed for England. The seemingly endless voyage finally ended and I debarked. I registered at a hotel, left my bags, and took a hansom cab.

Yes, I knew where I could find Jack the Ripper, *if* he was indeed Jack the Ripper. I knew his very address.

When my cab reached its destination, I was again struck with indecision. I directed the driver to pull ahead and halt at the kerb a door or two beyond.

I had intended to boldly knock upon his door. To be ushered up

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into his presence. Yet I had never been quite certain as to what would follow next.

If he were Jack the Ripper, would I finally have the courage to denounce him to his face? Tell him that I was finally going to the police with my knowledge?

Or perhaps it would be wiser, after I confirmed in my mind that he *was* Jack the Ripper, merely to appear embarrassed and declare that I must have the wrong address, that I had been looking for someone else.

And *then* should I go to the police?

I wiped my forehead with a handkerchief.

What *proof* did I actually have that he was the Ripper? None whatsoever. It would be my word against his.

He would deny his guilt, of course. One could hardly expect him to do otherwise, could one? And then would not I, in turn, be deemed the madman for daring to accuse such a man of a crime so vile?

Suppose, *suppose* that for some insane reason he *did* choose to confess? Was he perhaps even *hoping* to be found out? Would that not—to his warped mind—represent the very triumph of his career of murder? To reveal himself to the world and in doing so to utterly crush and ruin the reputation of—

I wiped my forehead again.

Should I at least send the police an anonymous letter? But what good would that do? A mere accusation, without proof, and with no one to stand behind it.

There was even the danger that the letter might be traced back to me. No, I could not take the risk of even an anonymous letter.

Besides, what would really be accomplished by revealing the identity of Jack the Ripper now?

After all, he *had* stopped his killings. His victims were dead and long buried. They could not be brought back to life.

Yes, Jack the Ripper had stopped his killing, and I knew *why*.

He had stopped because he had been presented with a new challenge. The killings, the mutilations had ceased to interest him. After all, it had been so easy to outwit the police. To continue the murders would be mere repetition of something already dared. And there always existed the possibility that one might be ingloriously apprehended by some unworthy dolt who might happen upon the scene at the wrong time.

No, the murders were *faits accompli*. They were done with. The past. Now there was a new game afoot. One that could be enjoyed,

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relished, *savoured* day after day, year after year. A *continuing* challenge.

And so he had deliberately sought out—

I glanced back up at the windows above the street floor. Was anyone home at the moment? Was there someone behind those curtains watching me? A tall thin man who might be filling his clay pipe with black tobacco from the toe of a Persian slipper?

The front door of the dwelling opened and a stout middle-aged woman appeared. She began shaking the dust out of a small scatter rug.

A hansom cab drew up behind mine and its passenger stepped down.

My heart raced as I recognised him.

Yes! It was Jack the Ripper himself getting out of the hansom!

There could be *no* doubt about it. He was the same man I had seen that dreadful night.

Jack paid off his cabbie. He glanced up at the windows of his lodgings. A faint smile came to his lips.

Then he picked up his little black bag, nodded to the stout woman, and entered 221-B Baker Street to join his friend, that great detective, upstairs in their quarters.

Yes, I know the *true* identity of Jack the Ripper, but I shall reveal it to no man.

I directed my driver to take me back to my hotel.

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a *NEW* suspense story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

The unusual story of a middle-aged bookkeeper, married and childless, who has a dream—to be in show business, to be a stand-up comedian. Well, other men have changed careers at the age of forty and beaten the odds. Besides, Jim Macauley had thought up the perfect stage name—say it aloud—Howie Telzem . . .

FUNNY MAN

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Jim Macauley had been working on and off all afternoon inventing the name he intended to use. He crumpled a few scribbled sheets of paper and tossed them into the wastebasket. As he printed his final choice in block letters on a clean page, he felt a thrill of excitement. HOWIE TELZEM. He said it aloud. It was a perfect name for a stand-up comedian.

Macauley began to daydream. In his mind he was looking at a television screen and there, in close up, was no less a master of ceremonies than Ed Sullivan. Macauley never hesitated to resurrect somebody like Sullivan for one of his fantasies. Once he even brought back Al Jolson who put his arm around Macauley and told an audience, "You ain't heard nothin' until you've heard this kid tell jokes."

Now Ed Sullivan pivoted before the camera, shoulders up, fingers locked under his chin, saying, "And now, for the first time on any stage, the greatest new comic talent in years. Here he is—Howie Telzem! Let's hear it for this young Canadian!"

The telephone rang. Macauley answered. It was one of the supervisors. "Jim, can I come in and get some petty cash? I'm taking a client out for drinks."

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"Petty cash is between nine and ten. That's so I can get on with time sheets and salaries and tax returns and debits and accounts receivable and a million other things that if I don't do them, the company's wheels will fall off."

"That's cute, I like that. I need the money."

"Then you better come in. But don't put your hand near my mouth. I'm going crazy in here."

Macauley *was* a little bit out of his mind but the condition had nothing to do with overwork. It stemmed from boredom. Years ago his parents persuaded him to take a course in bookkeeping so he could get into something permanent. Now, twenty years later, the truth had dawned on him; the grave would be permanent—life was a time for variety, action, change, travel, laughter, diversion, fun!

The telephone rang again. It was his wife.

"Hello, Bev."

"You haven't forgotten tonight, I hope. We're due at the Carsons at eight."

Macauley had forgotten. He glanced at the slip of paper where he had jotted down the time of his audition. Seven o'clock. "I'll have to meet you there. Something here needs finishing."

"All right, but try not to keep everybody waiting for once."

"I'll leave shortly after my departure. If I get there before I arrive, notify me."

Macauley put down the telephone and sat staring at his wife's photograph. Beverly was blonde and plump and as beautiful as a tax rebate. It was said her appearance was responsible for three account transfers to the ad agency where she was receptionist. Macauley never understood why she married him all those years ago. He had a small angular body, a large head, and a face like the map of Ireland. His spectacles sat like plate-glass windows over green eyes that washed around like olives in a couple of martinis.

Perhaps the marriage had happened because no other man had the courage to ask her. She was young then, just out of convent school. She entered the business world as a typist in a large insurance firm. The male population fell back in confusion as if she had tumbled out of a rolled-up carpet. Not Macauley. He looked up from his ledger and asked her to lunch. Six months later he asked her to marry him. Beverly said yes; what did she know?

Seventeen years later they were childless, still married (forever or for six months, whichever comes first, was Macauley's joke), and popular within their set. People like the Carsons enjoyed having the

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Macauleys over because Bev fed the eyes while Jim made everybody laugh.

"You should be on the stage," a friend would say after Macauley had dreamed up some such invention as the Transylvanian Mosquito—hooked thumbs, flapping hands, the sound of heavy wings, then a shocking attack on the hostess's bare arm, clamp, suck-suck-suck, and finally the ponderous terflup, terflup, away into the night.

"Yes, I ought to be on the stage," Macauley would echo, "and there's one leaving in ten minutes."

But it was no joke. Never mind forty years old. Forget all the wasted years. He knew, *he knew*, that given a rehearsed act and an audience prepared to listen, he could be hilarious. Too late? Perhaps, if he had kids to support. But there were no children.

Forty years old was irrelevant. There were thousands of examples of men who changed careers in middle age and became successful. Why, after only a couple of hours of thought, Macauley could easily name one. Gauguin, the painter. He left the stock-broking business, abandoned his wife, sailed to Tahiti, and produced canvases that would influence the art world forever. So what if he was an egomaniac who lived like an animal in a squalid hut, his body riddled with some of the worst symptoms since the Plague?

Bill Harris! There was another example, not so sordid. A middle-aged insurance salesman or something. Decided he wanted to play jazz trombone. Bought an instrument, practically taught himself. Ended up with Woody Herman, producing a unique sound no other trombonist ever achieved. And was Harris happy? Macauley remembered the time he saw the Herman Herd on tour, picked out Harris in the trombone section—a thin austere man with a gloomy face behind tinted glasses. But secretly happy, Macauley told himself.

The sound of people leaving the office at closing time brought Macauley back to reality. Right. He would concentrate on the time sheets for an hour. Then he would have two fast whiskies at Le Beret Bleu, after which he would go down the hill into Old Montreal, arriving at Comedy, Inc. primed for his audition.

The room seemed huge because there was nobody in it except Macauley on stage and this evil little jockey of a man named Louie Rachotte sitting on one of the tables with his shiny shoes on a chair. The table tops were stained, the chairs in disarray, the floor was littered with cigarette ends. There was a smell of last night's beer,

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of mildewed carpet, and of forgotten acts that had died on this very stage.

"Whenever you're ready," Rachotte called out in the confident voice of the French-Canadian who speaks several languages badly.

"I thought there'd be more people here. Not an audience of course, but the material goes better with somebody to laugh."

"Don't worry, I'm a good judge of comedy." If Rachotte had placed a small black cloth on his head it would have seemed appropriate.

Macauley took a deep breath and went ahead. "Good ladies evening and gentlemen. A funny thing happened outside the club. A guy came up to me and asked me for fifty cents for a cup of coffee. I said coffee's only a quarter. He said I was going to buy you a cup. Go easy on me, folks, I'm a transplant patient. I just had a liver transplant. The donor used to run a delicatessen. You guessed it—chopped liver."

In Macauley's fantasies his monologue was punctuated by laughter and applause. Now, delivering the lines into the echoing room, his timing went to pieces. He forgot bits of the routine, he had to correct himself and start again. At the end of his ten minutes he walked to where the club manager was sitting.

"I can do better," he apologized. "When I get warmed up, I throw in a lot of ad libs and if anybody—"

"Here's how we work," Rachotte interrupted. "You go on tomorrow night any time after ten depending how many performers we have. No music, we got no band. You'll be introduced by an MC but he doesn't appear on stage."

"You mean I passed? You'll use me?"

"That's what I said." Rachotte stepped down from the table—he was shorter standing up. His perfect little face, tanned cheeks, glistening flat hair, gave him the appearance of a marionette. Macauley felt that if he made a swift pass above Rachotte's head with a very sharp blade, the tiny man would collapse in a clatter of wooden limbs. "You got any friends? Bring as many as you can."

"I will." He was not sure he wanted his friends to see him first time out. As he left the club, the manager called after him.

"Did you have a drink before you came today?"

"Yes, I did."

"Have several tomorrow night."

The Carsons were fascinated. "You really did it," Judy said. "You're doing a turn at Comedy, Inc. Incredible." She was a former

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dancer with a ballet company, retired prematurely with knee problems. She was showbiz. "Do you want us there for support?"

"Not really. I want Bev, but I think I'll concentrate better without too many familiar faces."

Joe Carson was opening another bottle of wine. "I hear the hecklers there are fierce. That's the whole point. Some inexperienced guy goes on and the crowd tears him apart. A bit like bullfighting."

"Or bear baiting."

"I know. But I really want to do this. I'm forty years old. Now or never, right?"

"How do you feel about it, Bev?"

"If he wants to appear naked in public, let him." Beverly touched her wine glass to her lips. It was her first glass, the level scarcely lowered since the beginning of the meal. Years ago at a party, having enjoyed a few drinks, she looked at her face in a mirror and saw the beautiful symmetry starting to sag. She gave up alcohol then and there. "He's old enough to make his own decisions."

"Here's luck," Joe Carson said. "Some day we'll all be applauding the great Jim Macauley on TV."

"No, no, I've got a stage name. You'll be applauding Howie Telzem."

Judy laughed, managing to keep an edge on her voice at the same time. "So you won't have to be ashamed, Bev. Nobody will know you're his wife."

Later when the guests were gone and the Carsons were clearing up, Judy said, "How did that sweet guy ever saddle himself with such a heartless woman?"

"Sometimes when you marry beauty," Joe said, "they throw in the beast at no extra charge."

Macauley took Rachotte's advice about the extra drinks before going on. He was sitting with Beverly at the Comedy, Inc. bar while another amateur did his act. The bookkeeper had never attended the club, had only read publicity about comics appearing here for the first time. The man on stage was dying the death. He had made the mistake of letting the hecklers get on top of him and was now reduced to pleading. "If you'd only listen you might hear something funny."

"Keep bleeding," yelled a raucous voice. "That's funny enough for me."

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Beverly frowned at the glass as Macauley tipped it back. "You're going to be too drunk to go on."

"Might be a good idea." But he did not feel that way. Some inborn arrogance made him want to step out there into the spotlight and tame those lions. His veins were pulsing with alcohol and adrenalin. After all, if he faced certain death, yet lived, how very alive he would feel!

A small boy sauntered between tables and came to stand at Macauley's elbow. It was Louie Rachotte. "You're next," he said, like a centurion giving Spartacus his cue. Although he had spoken to Macauley, he only had eyes for Beverly.

"I'm ready. This is my wife. Bev, meet Monsieur Rachotte."

The little sadist actually kissed her hand. Had Macauley been calm enough to notice, he would have seen a look of interest light up his wife's face. "Bartender," said the club manager, "a champagne cocktail for the lady."

"She doesn't drink," Macauley said.

"Mind your own business," Beverly told him, "this is a special occasion." She gave Rachotte a helping hand as he scrambled onto the next stool.

A gong sounded. The victim on stage departed to hisses and slow, ironic applause. A voice on the public-address system said, "And now we move right along with another showbiz hopeful. Let's give a generous welcome to . . . Howie Telzem!"

"How he tells 'em? With a hope and a prayer," cried the raucous voice, getting a laugh as Macauley made his way quickly to the microphone in the spotlight.

"Good ladies evening and gentlemen," he began.

"Whittaker and Lloyd, Gayety Theatre, 1962," announced Raucous Voice.

Macauley plunged on. He soon realized none of his lines was succeeding. That was because the crowd had come, not to be entertained, but to play off on his jokes, to get laughs of their own, and hopefully, to trap him into having a nervous breakdown on stage. He kept on talking. A minor victory, he realized, would be simply to get through his act without falling apart.

At the bar Rachotte was saying, "I don't understand it. You are the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. Your husband is, well, a very ordinary guy."

She shrugged. "Opposites attract."

"Then there's hope for me?"

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"I find you fascinating. You remind me of my little brother and yet . . . you're forceful and domineering, like my father."

"Know what we need?" Rachotte said, leading her from the bar toward his private office. "A family reunion."

Macauley was feeling like a man in a dream who falls off a tall building and then begins to fly. He was not dead. In fact, he could not die. True, he was yet to make the crowd laugh with any of his material, but he was belting it out, line by line, surviving, refusing to fall. It was near the end of the routine when Raucous Voice called out, "Take 'em off!"

"If I do, your lady friend will come home with me."

"She'd have to be crazy."

"She must be—she's been sitting beside you all evening."

"When are you going to say something funny?"

"I can't—I don't know your name."

It was not a triumph, but the tempo began to change. The laughs were beginning to happen after Macauley's answers. The heckler's remarks were becoming straight lines. Macauley left the microphone to tolerant applause. He made his way to the bar, prepared to hear Bev's reaction, but she was not there. He stood in the dim light looking around. A heavyset, bald-headed, swarthy man in a dark suit and turtleneck sweater was overflowing a stool.

"The blonde beauty?" he said.

"Yes, my wife."

"She's gone for a while. Sit down, have a drink. I'm Boris Steiner."

Macauley shook hands and sat down. The hand was big and warm and gentle. Steiner's eyes were those of a beautiful woman; he must have inherited them from his mother. They suggested intelligence, a sense of humor, and no small degree of strength. He cushioned his head on one fist, elbow placed fastidiously on a bar mat.

"You look pleased with yourself," Steiner said.

"I'm glad it's over."

"I'm a theatrical agent. I book acts." Steiner ordered drinks. "Would you like my opinion of your routine?"

"A professional view would be welcome."

"You were terrible. The pace was awful from start to finish. Some of the gags were old, you stole them. If you steal, you have to adapt, make changes."

"Thanks for the encouragement."

"Wait. Let me give you the bottom line." The agent lifted his glass and drank. "You belong on stage. I knew that the moment you

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stepped into the light. Some people have it—you've got it. What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a bookkeeper."

"You're no kid. Would you be able to change?"

"That's why I'm here."

"You'd have to pay your dues, there's no other way. It means playing in horrible clubs in front of audiences who came to see the girls. It's rough, it's abrasive, but as it wears you down, it polishes you. The other thing is you make more money as a bookkeeper."

"My wife works. We don't have any kids to support." Macauley began looking around again for Beverly.

"Here's my business card," Steiner said. "Call me in a couple of days, I'll see what I can work out for you." The mild eyes scanned Macauley's face, assessing him, the surgeon deciding how much to tell the terminal patient. "Your wife went into the back office with Louie Rachotte."

Macauley finished his drink, pocketed Steiner's card, and left the bar. He asked a waiter where Rachotte's office was and went to that door. He rapped and waited. Silence. He opened the door and entered a small office containing a desk, a couple of chairs, and a well-worn upholstered sofa.

As he drifted about the room, Macauley felt strangely excited. For some time he had suspected his wife of having affairs. This was the closest he had come to one in the process of happening. He knew what Beverly was—she was a not-very-intelligent woman who must have to deal with several propositions every day. That was Beverly; what was he?

He was a voyeur. He was seeking signs in this room of his wife's having made love with another man. What did he expect to find? A garment, an earring, her scent on a cushion? His imagination provided images and his heart began to pound as if it was happening to him.

Prowling on, he moved objects on the desk, opened drawers. In one of them he saw a couple of ledgers, turned a cover, flipped a few pages. Despite himself, he found his professional eye assessing the columns of figures. A second ledger had been folded into the first one. He compared them, saw the discrepancy in the totals penciled into the second book. Interesting. . .

He did not see Beverly that night. When he awoke in the morning she was beside him. He shaved and dressed. As he was putting

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change into his pocket she woke up. "I hear you weren't bad," she said.

"They tell me you were pretty good yourself." He felt no anger.

"I was so nervous I couldn't watch. Mr. Rachotte had to go and see his boss at another club, so I went along."

"I'm to call a man named Steiner. An agent. He says he can book me somewhere."

"As a comic? You mean on tour?"

"That's how I read it. Poor you, you'll be left all alone."

Two days later Macauley rang Steiner and was told to meet him that night in the bar at Comedy, Inc. The news was good. "I can start you with a week in Val d'Or. Then two weeks in Rivière du Loup. These are rough places, can you face it?"

"I'd like to try."

"Okay. My secretary will send you schedules, contracts, you'll be paid through our office. You have to book your own hotels but I can recommend some places."

As they talked, Louie Rachotte walked through with a couple of slab-like men in expensive suits. Macauley reached out and snatched the little man out of his convoy. "Thanks for everything," he said. "Mr. Steiner saw me perform and he's got me some professional dates."

"Hello, Boris. You think this guy is any good?"

"Talk to me," Macauley said. "Thanks for buying my wife a drink."

"Forget it. I'm buying her another tonight."

"Sure you can afford it?"

"Is that one of your jokes?"

"I got the idea your finances are a little shaky. Something I saw in a book somewhere."

The two slabs had been looking bored. Now they began to look vaguely interested. When the convoy left, Steiner said, "A word of advice—don't mess with Rachotte. Those two characters with him own three of the bigger clubs in town plus this place. They're dangerous."

"To me or to him?"

"To anybody who gets in the water with them."

The week in Val d'Or was not as bad as Macauley had expected. The club was a massive tavern, rundown and seedy. The main problem was not the extrovert hostility he had experienced at Comedy, Inc. It was lack of interest. Macauley had to laugh at the situation

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on Wednesday night. There was a TV set behind the bar and while he was doing his act, the customers to a man were watching the Canadiens hockey game on the small screen.

But he found he could get laughs by being the "bloke," the stupid English-Canadian in this frantic world. He knew just enough French to put himself down, and the rest of the time his stunned ignorance began to come across as very funny to this mainly Québecois audience.

The Rivière du Loup date went even better. He was beginning to find a style. Jokes that worked were kept in; those that failed were cut. Effective ad libs became part of the act. Macauley slept late, roamed the streets in the afternoon looking for local material to be used on stage. It was a strange life, sordid, fatiguing, exciting, risky—but it beat balancing the books in a stuffy office.

He flew back to Montreal, saw Steiner, heard the club managers had been giving him good reviews. Then he checked in with Beverly who seemed to be changing. It was the first time Macauley had been separated from her for such a length of time. She appeared frayed around the edges, as if she was not keeping up the required maintenance. Well, Macauley himself was becoming something different—life was happening to everybody. Old age would arrive day after tomorrow, and something had to happen along the way.

The Carsons insisted on having them over for dinner. They wanted to hear about the tour. Macauley fractured them with his description of the patrons in the Rivière du Loup scuffing by the stage on their way to the bathroom with their three-hasp galoshes flapping open.

"Here's to the guest of honor," Joe Carson said with a raised glass. "It isn't the jokes, it's Howie Telzem."

"You must miss him," Judy prompted Bev, looking at her with perceptive eyes. "I'd hate to have Joe away that much."

"So would I," Beverly said, giving Joe's hand a squeeze.

When the guests were gone, Judy was clearing the table. "I'm worried about those two," she said.

"Somebody has to contribute to the divorce rate."

"It isn't funny."

"I'm not laughing," Joe Carson said. "I'm sad."

Macauley did two weeks in a little club in the east end of Montreal. It was here that Boris Steiner came backstage with a reedy woman wearing denim and boots and with a battered hat pulled down over hair that looked self-cut. She still managed to be attractive.

"Meet Toni Lanthier," Steiner said. "She's producing a new TV

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situation-comedy series at Radio-Canada. I told her about you and she's interested."

"That's fabulous, but I don't work in French."

"*Pas de probléme*," said the producer. She pulled off her hat and pushed a stubby hand through her ragged hair. It became apparent why she affected this ragamuffin look; had Toni Lanthier prettied herself up, there would have been fighting in the streets. "I've seen your act. Your appearance, your personality—just right. The dumb bloke—this is the portrayal I want. All the other characters will be French and there in the middle, not knowing what the hell is going on, is the crazy English. Why not? We try it one episode, see what happens."

Macauley made no great news out of his being cast in the TV show. It was scheduled as a one-time shot and he was sure that would be the end of it. He told Beverly when she came to the house to pick up the last of her clothes. The wardrobe had been emptying out a few garments at a time.

"Guess what, I'm going to be in a comedy series on Channel Two."

"If that's what you want."

"All I want is a chance to perform and get better."

"Every day in every way." Beverly spoke in a mocking tone most of the time these days. She snapped shut the suitcase and broke a fingernail—not the first one, Macauley noted. "Dammit to hell!" But even as she swore, the clay features remained passive, the death mask of a beautiful face.

"Are you happy, Bev?"

"Why not? I don't have to show up at that boring ad agency every morning. You know how I like to sleep late."

"People don't *like* to sleep late, not all the time. They do it because there's nothing to get up for."

She carried her suitcase in one hand, the keys to Rachotte's convertible in the other. Macauley followed her to the front door, stood on the step as she walked to the car and slung the bag into the back seat. "It's very simple," she said. "You married me when I was young and stupid. Now that I've woken up I find I've wasted half my life."

He watched the car rumble down the street and turn the corner, it and its driver looking like something out of a glossy commercial. Macauley went inside and slammed the door. At the sink he turned on the water and drank three huge glassfuls one after the other.

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Now, for the first time, he felt angry at Rachotte and furious with his unfaithful wife.

Rehearsals of the TV show turned out to be a joy. Sitting in the studio, drinking coffee, waiting to go on, belonging, Macauley felt a sense of security beyond anything he had ever experienced. The bookkeeping job had been secure but in the same way a prison is secure. The club dates had been terrifying. But the big broadcasting corporation had been around forever. The staff looked fat, complacent, somehow more civilized. Was it their Gallic sophistication? Macauley knew enough French to laugh at their jokes, to contribute a phrase or two. They seemed to like him.

And when he came on for the first time to rehearse his short bit, the set came alive. Everybody stopped working and crowded around and at his first joke—the rattled response of an English tourist making a *faux pas* in a French hotel—the place fell apart.

It ended too soon. The scriptwriter came to him and clapped a comradely hand on his shoulder. The producer's voice echoed through the speaker, "*Très bien*, Monsieur Macauley. *Mon Dieu, que t'es fou!*"

One of the leading actresses was a woman named Monique Carpentier. She worked in a wheelchair, played the part of a novelist who also wrote poetry. In a show that was mainly comedy she provided a dimension of sensitivity. Macauley was so accustomed to seeing her wheel about the set, he was surprised when she got up and walked toward him.

"That character is too good. I am going to tell the author."

"Sorry?"

"Too good for just one appearance. He must bring you back."

"I wouldn't say no." She was a short dark woman with exotic eyes. There might have been a touch of Iroquois in her. Macauley surprised himself by saying, "May I buy you a drink when we finish here?"

"I'd like that, Monsieur."

Macauley's episode went out on the air two weeks later. The character was even more of a success with the critics than anticipated. Several of them devoted inches of space to the hilarious introduction of the inane bloke. Macauley's picture was run on a couple of entertainment pages. Now the author wrote him into every script. He became a regular, recognized by the commissionaires on the door at Edifice Radio-Canada, and that nice CBC check became an expected feature of his Thursday morning mail . . .

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Boris Steiner got out the office bottle only for his more valued clients. Now he poured stiff drinks for himself and Macauley and they sat back with shoes propped on the desk, staring out the window at the sun going down behind the flashing signs of the Peel and Ste. Catherine intersection—Little Times Square.

"I knew you had the spark. Didn't I tell you the first time I saw you?"

"I never expected to be on television within a year."

"You have talent, Macauley. And determination. But beyond that, you have luck."

"I'm paying my dues, Boris. Like you said. Nobody gets away free."

"Your wife and Rachotte?" The agent pushed papers on his desk. "I understand how you feel. If you want me to say no to this offer from Comedy, Inc.—"

"No, let's do it. I want to play there again." The germ of an idea was hatching in Macauley's mind. "I think I'll prepare some special material."

He took Monique Carpentier to dinner in response to a couple of late meals he had enjoyed at her apartment. They sat at one of the back tables at Mas des Oliviers. "Will it bother you if I'm in the audience?" she asked.

"No, I was counting on it."

"Will your wife be there?"

"It doesn't matter. She's living with the club manager now. We're finished." He tasted the crêpes maison. "Except for the last act."

"What's that?"

"Wait and see. A touch of retribution. I suppose I should be grateful to be rid of her, but a part of me wants to give Rachotte a black eye. Anyway, it may not even work."

On the night of Howie Telzem's much-publicized return to Comedy, Inc. every seat was occupied and there were people lined up in the square. Macauley delivered Monique to a reserved table where she joined Boris Steiner. Then he went to the private office where he had been told certain luminaries were waiting to meet him.

Louie Rachotte poured him a drink, then introduced him to the pair of slab-like men he had seen in the bar months before. They were wearing tuxedos tonight, the fabric straining across beefy chests. Macauley raised his glass to Beverly who was crowded onto the sofa beside an older man, silver-haired, dark, and wrinkled as a walnut.

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There was no menace in these dangerous people tonight. They loved to associate with celebrities and this one had been discovered in their club. "Are you doing the same act you did last summer?" Rachotte asked.

"Parts of it. With better timing, I hope. But pay attention." Macauley winked at the ancient boss beside his wife. "I've put in some special material for the occasion."

The audience response was a lot different from the first time. The hecklers were on hand but they now claimed Telzem as their own. He had been forged in the heat of their critical reaction. Now they cheered as he came on stage, then fell silent.

"What a difference a year makes," Macauley began. He started with some jokes taken from his experiences in the boondocks, then slipped into a routine based on the character in the TV sitcom. He had the crowd in the palm of his hand. He could see the glow of Steiner's cigar, could catch a glimpse of Monique's smile.

Closer to the stage, the board of directors sat beaming at a long table with Rachotte perched like a cricket on a rock and Beverly's blonde head leaning close to that of the old boss.

"Yes, it's wonderful to be back where I started. And I'd like to thank the man who gave me my opportunity. Mr. Louie Rachotte. Could we have the light on Mr. Rachotte over here?" The crowd applauded, the manager produced a tight grin.

"Could we have a magnifying glass on Mr. Rachotte? Was that him? I thought it was something that crawled out of the woodwork. Seriously, folks, Louie Rachotte has done me a lot of favors. He took me in off the street. He let me do my act. He stole my wife. Don't laugh, how many men are willing to take over a second-hand wife with forty thousand miles on her?

"Of course, Louie is good at stealing. Not just wives. You should see the second set of books he keeps in his bottom drawer. Those double entries he makes on the liquor account. I used to be a bookkeeper, I know what I'm talking about. Louie doesn't have to worry, though. He keeps the boss distracted. That's what my wife is for—while she sits on the old man's lap, Louie siphons off the money. My only question is, how much are you paying the auditor, Louie?"

The crowd was laughing as Macauley moved into his closing topic but he could see the faces of the club owners at the front table. Two of them were looking at each other while the old boss stared at Rachotte.

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A month later Boris Steiner dropped in to the CBC canteen during a break in rehearsals. "When you finish taping this series, how would you like me to book you for two weeks in a nice club in Toronto?"

"Thanks, Boris, but Monique doesn't like me going that far away."

"I heard you're getting married as soon as the divorce from Bev comes through. Congratulations. Okay, what say I find you something good here in Quebec."

"Thanks again, but I don't have to work that hard any more."

"Come on, I know what CBC pays. You still need income."

"I've got income. I'm the new manager of Comedy, Inc."

"You surprise me."

"The boss figures I'll be a good man to spot talent."

"What's happening with Louie Rachotte?"

"He's been sent to run a girlie club in Chicoutimi. It was that or donate himself as ashes to fertilize the big man's garden."

"I know that Chicoutimi club," Steiner said. "It's the end of the world, the customers keep their overcoats on. Rachotte will go crazy there."

"No, he won't. He's taking Beverly with him." Macauley's face was hard. "With her for company at home, the club will seem like an oasis."

The agent was looking wise and mournful at the same time. "So you got your revenge," he said. "I'm afraid it only depresses me. You better say something funny."

Macauley searched his mind but all he saw was something that looked like the surface of the moon. "I can't think of a thing," he said.

"Q"

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a *NEW* detective story by

GEOFFREY BUSH

Meet Ellie, eight years old, who has already chosen her life work. She is a detective—"the kind of detective who relied a lot on her intuition." And precocious Ellie needed all her intuitive powers to solve the mystery of the man with the strange, squinty eyes . . .

THE MYSTERY OF HIDDEN BEACH

by GEOFFREY BUSH

Ellie loved mysteries.

Ellie was eight years old. But she had already begun her career as a detective.

It was fun. More fun than going to camp.

And there were mysteries everywhere.

There was the mystery, for example, of why the old lady who lived in the cottage with the crooked front porch had walked by yesterday with her net shopping bag full of baby food, although she didn't have a baby.

Or the mystery of why the big stone house on the point had lights that went on every night at sunset, although the rich people who stayed there were in Europe this summer.

Or the mystery—and this was a really irritating mystery—of why Ellie herself had to wear a messy blob of white sun cream on her nose, although there wasn't any sun to speak of this morning, just a nice, warm, misty sort of haze, and all she was doing was making a quick exploration of Hidden Beach, before lunch, looking for a real mystery.

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Because, to tell the truth, the mysteries she'd found so far hadn't turned out to be very real ones.

The old lady who had bought the baby food, for instance, had turned out to be having trouble with her dentures.

The big stone house on the point, Ellie's older sister had told her, in a bored, obnoxious, older-sister voice, had a switch that turned the lights on every night, automatically, while the rich people were away.

And the reason she had to wear a messy blob of white sun cream on her nose, of course, was that she had a mother who was super-careful about every single little thing, and never let a person explore anywhere interesting, and discover anything really mysterious that would baffle everybody, and that only she, Ellie, would be able to solve, in the final chapter.

It was her biggest problem.

How could she ever investigate a real mystery if she had a mother like that?

But now, after she had walked between the last two sand dunes, concentrating on where she was going, partly to avoid stepping on the poison ivy with her bare feet and partly to watch for anything that might be protruding out of the sand—like one corner of a pirate treasure chest, revealed after centuries to the casual but alert glance of an observant young person—now, however, biting the same fingernail that she had been biting all morning, wearing her shorts and her Equal Rights Amendment T-shirt, with her fair hair stuffed under her father's crimson, 25th-college-reunion baseball cap—her long stupid hair, as long and stupid as her mother's, that her mother made her dry with a separate towel after she'd been in swimming—now she halted, looked down the short length of Hidden Beach, and saw something promising.

A man.

An old man.

Well, no, that was wrong. That was the kind of dumb deduction you made when you were eight.

A *middle-aged* man. In a swimsuit, sitting and staring out to sea. In a strange, squinty way.

That was all she could see of him, at this distance. (Was it a hundred yards? Strange figures, in the books she read, were often first glimpsed at a distance of a hundred yards. But she wasn't quite sure, to be honest, about the difference between a hundred yards and a hundred feet. Or fifty feet. It wasn't until distances got down

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to about twenty feet that she began to feel confident about them.) She couldn't even tell, in fact, if the way he was staring out to sea was really strange and squinty.

But she had a feeling it was. And she was the kind of detective who relied a lot on her intuition.

She stood without moving, almost without breathing, with the little tingly sensation in her spine—or her throat, or her fingertips, or wherever it was—that was one reason she bit her fingernails, that and what her teachers called her extra nervous energy—observing the man in the swimsuit.

Because this was the most exciting moment about a mystery. When it might actually turn out to be a real one.

The dunes were so high that there were no houses overlooking Hidden Beach, except the big stone house on the point. You could barely see Hidden Beach from Hidden Beach Road. And nobody ever came here, except to have picnics.

Certainly nobody ever came here in a bathing suit. To swim.

The Mystery of Hidden Beach.

Taking a big breath—a sort of sigh, because this could be the most disappointing moment about a mystery—she moved forward.

The walking was easier here. There wasn't any poison ivy to step on, only the edge of an occasional shell, and the tide, going down, had left the sand nice and damp and hard.

As she came closer, she saw more things about him. The beach towel he was sitting on, for example, was really wild, red and yellow and jaggedy, like an exploding spaceship. At this side of him, on the sand, was a large, modern-looking, purple-and-green beach bag. And on the sand at the other side of him, the side she couldn't see, was something else big and floppy and bright-colored.

He himself, though, was sort of small. Small and pale and round, with pale, freckled shoulders and a tummy that was sticking out in folds, one fold on top of another, because of the small, round, scrunched-up way he was sitting, his knees drawn up and his hands clasped in front of him.

Thanks to the surf—though there wasn't very much of it—and to the breeze, and to a couple of seagulls that were flying around squawking, he hadn't heard her yet. At what she thought was the right distance (just about twenty feet) she paused to clear her throat. She didn't want to startle him. And he really was looking out to sea—as far as anyone could look, in the bright shimmery haze—in an odd, intent way.

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A pirate captain, she said to herself, her mind still on treasure chests, who'd been marooned by his crew on this desolate coast.

He wasn't, of course. It wasn't even a desolate coast—only this little part of it. But now was her last chance to imagine something like that, before he turned his head and saw her.

He didn't act particularly startled. More like bewildered. As if his pirate crew—there was time to make up one bit more—had hit him over the head with a plank before they abandoned him, and he hadn't quite come to yet.

She took another couple of steps.

"Hi," she said.

He had a pale, round, middle-aged face, with nothing special about it. It was just a face. A sort of tight, wooden face. He looked like one of the fathers who came to her school in the winter to watch the field hockey games and didn't really understand the rules.

"Hello."

She couldn't tell much from his voice, either. It was just a voice. A sort of stiff, anxious voice.

She waited.

The polite way to begin a conversation, her mother had told her, was to ask people about themselves.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

He looked around. He didn't seem to know exactly what he was doing.

"It's a pretty beach," he said.

"Yes," she said, a little impatiently.

Naturally it was a pretty beach. Everybody knew it was a pretty beach. But they didn't go around talking about it.

Besides, he hadn't answered her question.

"You didn't come here to swim, did you?" she asked.

From the thin fine hair that was moving about gently in the breeze, on the top of his round freckled scalp, she deduced that he hadn't been in swimming yet. Or else that he'd dried himself off. But he didn't have the look of someone who'd dried himself off.

"To swim?" he repeated.

Maybe he wasn't very bright. In that case, he wasn't like the fathers who came to her school, who were all extremely bright, except about field hockey. It was a school for extremely bright children, like her.

"You're not supposed to swim here. There's a current."

"There is?"

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"A riptide," she explained carefully, "when the tide is going down, that carries you right out. Out beyond the point." She waved her hand at the big stone house. Its outline could just be seen through the haze. "Then someone has to run and tell the lifeguards. At the Town Beach."

"The Town Beach?"

"On the other side of the point." She could run there in almost three minutes. It would take him longer, of course. "They go out after you in the launch. If they're in time."

He looked at her.

"After the first hour or so it's too late." She paused, to let him absorb this information. "People come here to have picnics. But they don't come here to swim." An exception occurred to her. It made her mad whenever she thought of it. "Except some crazy boys," she added scornfully.

He turned his head in a jumpy way, as if he was afraid there might be some crazy boys out there now. She stood on tiptoe and tried to see into his purple-and-green beach bag. She saw part of a pair of big violet-colored sunglasses.

They didn't look like a man's sunglasses.

She let herself down on the sand.

"Didn't anybody tell you? About Hidden Beach?" Maybe he'd like to hear the story. "The Indians thought there was a spirit, with green eyes and fish scales, but a body like a man. He was very powerful and dragged people down by their hair, to live with him in his undersea kingdom." Now came the interesting part. "And once you got used to it, and learned how to breathe water, you were very happy there."

She stopped.

"Of course that's just a story," she went on reassuringly. "It isn't real."

He must be a new person. That would account for his being so pale. And his not knowing the legend of Hidden Beach.

Still, it was peculiar.

She would ask him some more things about himself. That way maybe she could find out what he was doing here.

"Are you renting one of the cabins?"

Everybody couldn't afford to rent a real cottage, the way her family did, year after year.

"They're nice," she said politely.

They *were* nice. Each cabin had its own TV and sat in its own

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little grove of pine trees. You could sneak in and out of your cabin without anybody seeing you, almost.

He still didn't speak. He just looked at her, in a helpless, squinty way. As if everything was too puzzling for him. Or too dazzly.

"Why don't you wear the sunglasses?" she asked.

He looked down. Instead of answering, he tried to shut the top of his beach bag, with an awkward, jerky movement.

It wouldn't stay shut, naturally.

He looked up.

This was certainly one of Ellie's more difficult investigations.

Then she understood. They were somebody else's sunglasses.

"Do you have a little girl?" she asked.

"No, I don't."

At least he'd answered. And he hadn't acted sad, or pretend-sad, the way some people did, when they were actually quite glad they didn't have a little girl.

She would be glad, herself, when she wasn't a little girl. Being a little girl got in the way of your career.

"Do you have a mother?" she asked. And immediately wished she hadn't. Because that was the kind of dumb question a little girl *would* ask.

"A mother?"

"I mean," she said, a little too loudly, because she was so annoyed with herself, "a wife?"

"Oh." He smiled. A small squinty smile. It disappeared. "No." He looked away. His voice had changed a little. "Not any more."

She knew what *that* meant.

They talked a lot about divorce at her school. Quite a few of the fathers who came to the hockey games were divorced. The mothers had left home to have adventures. That was why the fathers came to the hockey games by themselves.

The sunglasses must have belonged to his wife. And he still had them in his beach bag.

"Did she leave home?"

"Leave home?"

"To have adventures? And begin a career?"

He was silent.

Ellie understood. It was a painful subject.

In her own case her mother had never left home. She preferred to stay and boss Ellie around. It was Ellie herself who might have to leave home, if her mother didn't allow her to explore farther than

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Hidden Beach. She and her mother, after their big argument about whether Ellie was going to go to camp this summer, had had a big argument about not exploring farther than Hidden Beach. Until her father had made peace between them, sort of.

Everybody said that she and her mother were a lot alike.

"What was she like?"

"She was—"

Ellie waited for him to tell what his mother—no, dummy, his *wife*—was like. But he didn't.

He looked at his wrist. There was nothing there to look at except freckles and thin fine hairs.

"Do you know what time it is?" he asked.

In her head she added up the places she had been to this morning. The footbridge across the inlet. The upside-down rock where she looked for dead bodies. But not the cottage where the dumb little girl lived that her mother kept trying to get her to make friends with.

She didn't want to make friends. She wasn't absolutely positive, with her extra nervous energy, and her precocious, impatient, argumentative personality, that she *could* make friends.

"It's about 11:30."

"Is that all?"

"It could be later." She reflected. It was important to be accurate. "Or earlier."

"It must be later."

He sounded quite concerned about it. Maybe he'd been brought up to be very punctual.

Ellie knew how that could happen.

"Was she strict?"

"Who?"

"Your—" Ellie caught herself. "Wife?"

He hesitated. To put him more at his ease, Ellie almost pointed to the white blob on her nose, as an example of what strictness could do to a person.

But the blob must be obvious. And he wasn't looking at her.

"Yes," he said. Just when it seemed as if he wasn't going to say anything. "She was."

"About getting home on time?"

"About *everything*."

Maybe, Ellie thought, the two of them had something in common.

It gave her a new sensation. Not the tingle in her spine, or her

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throat, or her fingertips, but another feeling. A warmer feeling, deeper inside. Like a stomachache.

Maybe she had found a friend.

"Was she strong-minded?"

"Strong-minded" was one of Ellie's mother's favorite expressions. Or, when she was cross, its opposite: "weak-minded."

"*Very* strong-minded."

"Did she get mad at you?"

"In front of—other people."

Ellie knew what that felt like. Her mother didn't care how many other people were in the room when she got mad at Ellie.

"Did you ever fight back?"

"I tried to." He paused. "But it came out all wrong. Like—complaining." There was a sort of complaining sound in his voice now. "Like—*whining*."

Ellie sounded like that, too, sometimes. Though, to be fair, it was usually when she knew her mother was right.

That was part of her problem. The biggest part. Her mother was nearly always right.

She squatted on her heels.

"Did you ever think of doing something?"

He was squeezing his small round fingers. "Doing something?"

"Something drastic?"

His hands stopped moving.

"Drastic?"

"Like running away?"

He made a little noise. Like a snort.

"I didn't have to."

He was lucky. It was his wife who had left home. That must be what was making him so excited and talkative.

He was peering out into the mist, a pink flush on his pale round cheek, the folds of his tummy going in and out. The silence seemed more silent than before, except for his fast, trembly breathing. Instead of two seagulls, there were now four, and they weren't flying around squawking, but standing in a row, on a dune, glaring, as if they thought there might be a picnic lunch in his beach bag.

Ellie stood up.

"Where did she go?"

"Go?"

"When she went away?"

"Went away?"

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"When you got divorced."

"We didn't get divorced. We were married—twenty-six years."

"What happened?"

"She just—vanished. This morning. Into the mist." There was a queer high note in his voice. "Laughing and splashing. With someone—with green eyes. And fish scales. Who is going to make her very happy, in her new home." He turned. He had a feverish, glittery triumphant air. "While I just sat here. And watched. Isn't that strange?"

Ellie felt strange.

She ought to feel pleased, since he seemed to. But she didn't.

She felt like turning and running away. Home.

But that was silly.

That wouldn't even be polite, without saying goodbye.

Don't be so weak-minded, she told herself. Just as if she were her mother.

And then suddenly everything was different.

"Well." He glanced at his wrist. "Time to go." He got to his feet, in a clumsy, middle-aged way. "I must have been here at least two hours by now."

Ellie took a deep, relieved breath. She had almost believed him.

"That was just pretend, wasn't it?"

He picked up his beach bag.

"That was just you, wasn't it?" she said. "Making up a story?"

He picked up his red and yellow beach towel. Beside it, on the sand, was the other big, floppy bright-colored thing she hadn't been able to see properly before.

It was another beach towel. In orange and blue.

She felt a tingle.

There *was* a mystery.

"What's that?" she said.

Some of her long fair hair, that must have come out from under her baseball cap, stirred in the breeze and tickled the back of her neck.

That was the only clue she needed.

"I bet I know!" she exclaimed.

It was really funny.

His wife must have made him dry his hair with a separate towel. Because she was so strict.

And he still did.

Even though his hair was so thin and fine.

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It made the warm feeling Ellie had about him, deep inside, even warmer.

The two of them *did* have something in common.

"That's—" she began.

And broke off.

She could pretend, too.

"That's *her* towel."

He was trying to stuff it into his beach bag.

"What?"

The important thing, when you were making up a story, was to keep a straight face.

"You forgot about it."

He stopped.

"When you sat here," she said. "And watched her drown."

He stared at her.

"And didn't run to the Town Beach," she went on. "And tell anybody."

It was all she could do not to giggle.

"Murderers always make mistakes," she said.

His face seemed to sag. Then it crumbled, like one of those buildings that were blown up on TV, and fell part.

"It wasn't me." His mouth was trembling. "She shouldn't have gone in swimming." There were big tears in his eyes. "It was *her* fault," he said, in a shrill, angry, whining voice.

As if he was a little boy.

And it was his mother he was mad at. For going away.

And this was another part of the same mystery. Like the beach towel. And the sunglasses.

But for the first time in Ellie's career, as she backed away, biting a fingernail, she didn't think she wanted to solve it.

"Q"

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

THE COMPLETE POE? Until this year I'd been quite content with my 1966 Doubleday edition of the *Complete Stories of Edgar Allan Poe,* believing that these 66 tales—plus Poe's only novel, *The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym of Nantucket*—constituted all his fiction. But 1981 saw the publication of three new "complete" editions, and no two of these books are in agreement!

The newcomers, all hardbound, are: *The Complete Edgar Allan Poe Tales* (Avenel, $6.98), containing 67 stories plus *Pym; Edgar Allan Poe: The Complete Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (Octopus, $7.98), containing 70 stories plus *Pym* and most of the poems; and *The Annotated Tales of Edgar Allan Poe* (Doubleday, $35.00), edited by Stephen Peithman, called "complete" on the jacket but containing only 61 stories.

So how many Poe stories are there in all—61, 66, 67, or 70? Part of the confusion is easily explained, since the Octopus edition, for example, contains pieces like "Maelzel's Chess Player," which are generally classified as essays. But what are we to make of a long narrative called "The Journal of Julius Rodman" included in the Avenel edition but nowhere else? Unfortunately, Avenel and Octopus offer no notes and only brief unsigned introductions. The annotated Doubleday edition is a fine job, replete with facts and dates, but contains fewer stories than the other editions.

Happily for mystery readers, all of Poe's tales of detection and murder can be found in any of the above volumes. But the true Poe scholar cannot be blamed for feeling a bit confused. (I have not been able to consult the two-volume edition of Poe's *Tales & Sketches* published in 1978 by Harvard University Press, but I suspect it may include some tales like "The Elk" and the unfinished "The Light-House," which are missing from all the above editions. They do appear in a 1951 Modern Library volume, *Selected Poetry and Prose of Edgar Allan Poe.)*

PAPERBACK HISTORIES: Two new books explore the world of American paperbacks in the decades between 1939 and 1959. Geoffrey O'Brien's *Hardboiled America* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, $16.95) concentrates on hardboiled fiction, while *Paperbacks, U.S.A.* by Am-

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sterdam artist Piet Schreuders (Blue Dolphin Enterprises, 4887 Ronson Court, San Diego, CA, $10.95) takes a broader view. Both books are profusely illustrated and devote much space to a discussion of paperback cover art. (The Schreuders book was translated from the Dutch by *EQMM* contributor, Josh Pachter, presently an Amsterdam resident.)

FREDRIC BROWN REMEMBERED: It's good to know that an author as talented as Fredric Brown is still remembered nearly ten years after his death. *A Key to Fredric Brown's Wonderland* by Newton Baird is a 63-page, 8½" by 11" book containing a study of Brown's life and work, together with an annotated bibliographic checklist, reminiscences by his wife and agent, and a brief essay by Brown himself. It's just been published by Talisman Literary Research, Inc., P.O. Box 455, Georgetown, CA 95634, in hardcover at $15.00 and paperback at $8.95.

SHERLOCKIAN CARTOONS: The Sherlock Holmes Cartoon Book by Marc Bilgrey contains an even hundred cartoons about Holmes, Watson, and some of their famous cases. It's available at bookstores or direct from Cuckoo Bird Press, P.O. Box 501, Ansonia Station, New York, NY 10023, for $5.00 plus 95¢ handling.

MYSTERY BOOKSHOP: A new mystery bookshop, *The Butler Did It,* opened this past summer at 10449A Green Mountain Circle, Columbia, MD—between Baltimore and Washington. Proprietor Gail M. Larson reports her shop carries new books, games, and puzzles.

ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE: A hardbound facsimile edition of Volume One of *The Armchair Detective* has been published by Brownstone Books, 1711 Clifty Drive, Madison, IN 47250. Price is $16.00 plus $1.00 handling.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Mystery researcher Michael L. Cook is preparing a mammoth reference book on mystery, detective, and espionage magazines and book clubs, to be published by Greenwood Press. The book will contain separate profiles—by Cook and others—of more than 300 professional and amateur magazines, from the dime novel through the pulps to the present.

The Essential Chesterton, edited by Ian Boyd, will contain memorable Chesterton quotations drawn from his fiction and nonfiction, including the Father Brown stories. The book will be published by St. Ignatius Press, San Francisco.

Stephen King's next book will be *Different Seasons,* a collection of four novellas. It'll be followed by *The Talisman,* a collaborative fantasy novel with Peter Straub.

Coming from Coward McCann later in 1982 will be *Gun in Cheek,* Bill Pronzini's satiric look at some of the less memorable books and authors in the mystery genre.

Stuart Woods's highly praised novel, *Chiefs* (Norton, $14.95), recently condensed in *Crime Digest,* will be a miniseries on CBS-TV.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

What Broadway needs—always—is a good mystery play, and while *A Talent for Murder,* featuring the talents of Claudette Colbert, may not be wrought for the ages, it *has* entertainment, surprises, and is almost studiously traditional. Its best asset is Colbert, playing an imperious mystery novelist named Anne Royce McClain, author of nearly seventy thrillers and second in sales only to Agatha Christie, at whom she sneers. (Indeed, when informed her latest book has won an Edgar from the Mystery Writers of America, she wonders genially why "those bums" waited so long.) Now confined to a wheelchair, the elderly matriarch of a houseful of dangerous relatives, she must fend off schemes against her life, or at the very least her sanity—but happily she is about as helpless as a snarling wolf at bay.

The trappings in which we find our heroine are as richly melodramatic as any thriller of yore: a rambling estate nestled in shadowy Berkshire pines, a house filled with priceless Picassos and sliding panels, plus a walk-in safe that can double as a gas chamber, and peopled with greedy, kinky offspring and an odd Indian servant who once served time for murder. There are some modern props as well—smoke detectors, electronic bugs, and zippy motorized wheels on which invalid Colbert keeps, figuratively if not always actually, three steps ahead of the rest of the cast. Sharp old mystery plotter that she is supposed to be, the *grande dame* of crime not only zestfully attacks the murder under her nose, she—in the best traditions of the genre—rises completely above the law in dealing with the evildoer, sending that person off on Qantas Airways far enough away to escape the reach of young Assistant District Attorney "Charlie" (she knew *him* when he was checkout boy at her supermarket). We don't for a minute ever fear that the killer will successfully strike Colbert down, but there are some marvelously frightening moments, especially the first-act curtain—when the glass-enclosed death-safe comes into murderous use.

Although it has often been said that on the screen Claudette Colbert played with equal facility both drama and comedy, she is not readily known for her mystery performances. However, she has been in quite a few thrillers, starting with *Hole in the Wall* (1929), as an ex-convict falling in with a band of criminals headed by Edward G. Robinson. In 1932's *The Phantom President,* in which she aids a ringer substituting for a presidential candidate, she ends up becoming the nation's First Lady. *I Cover the Waterfront* (1935) had a reporter (Ben Lyon) expose her father as the leader of a gang smuggling Chinese aliens inside the bodies of giant fish!

As the *Maid of Salem* (1937), Colbert was a Puritan girl in a grim tale of New England witchburning which

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closely presaged Arthur Miller's *The Crucible.*

It's a Wonderful World (1939) is a whodunit in which Colbert, a noted poet, helps private-detective Jimmy Stewart solve a baffling backstage murder. *Tomorrow Is Forever* (1945) is a romantic melodrama in which she is a widow who remarries, only to have her first husband (Orson Welles), supposedly killed in the war, return twenty years later, crippled and disfigured, into the shadowy edges of her life. Then came two interesting suspense chillers—*Sleep, My Love* (1948), in which husband Don Ameche is determined to drive her mad in his best *Gaslight* manner, and *The Secret Fury* (1950), in which maniac Robert Ryan is bent on destroying her. The following year Colbert played a mother superior in *Thunder on the Hill* trying to establish the innocence of convicted murderess Ann Blythe, who has taken refuge in her convent. The film was an interesting, unusual mystery.

Early in 1981 it was widely announced that Colbert would play acerbic mystery novelist Cornelia Van Gorder in a stage revival of Mary Robert Rinehart's *The Bat,* which—since first spreading its wings in 1920—had become one of the world's most successful mystery plays. That project unfortunately fell through. Cornelia was merely an eccentric snoop, though—Zasu Pitts played her in the last Broadway revival—while in *A Talent for Murder* Colbert has the opportunity to play a crime-solving mystery novelist with flash, in a dark-house setting slightly less old than in *The Bat.*

The ability to give a fairly standard melodrama play a light, modern approach is the skill of the two authors of *A Talent for Murder,* both expert comedy craftsmen. Jerome Chodorov, among other credits, wrote the first Perry Mason screenplay and on Broadway directed *The Gazebo* (under which, you will recall, a blackmailer's body was buried). The celebrated Norman Panama authored two outstanding espionage comedies: Bob Hope's classic *My Favorite Blonde,* and *Knock on Wood,* using what he tells EQMN was a "double dummy" device—neurotic ventriloquist Danny Kaye bewildered when his puppet (containing plans) is gypsy-switched by enemy agents. Both films, while fast-moving fun, had their serious share of crime and corpses.

The same ingredients—fun and corpses—make up *A Talent for Murder,* the first Broadway play in years to have a masked killer (a towering native mask at that!) sneaking across a darkened stage. It's great to have crime back across the footlights and to hear those audiences shriek.

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INTERVIEW: GEORGE BAXT (1)

This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

EQMN: When were you first published professionally?

BAXT: Believe it or not, my first work was published at the age of seven in the *Brooklyn Eagle* in Elsie-Jean's children's column. It was a poem and I was paid two dollars. Little stories followed at five bucks a throw, and for at least three or four years I had myself a fairly steady income. These were Depression years, and regardless of the fact my father owned a grocery I myself was on short rations where cash was concerned, ao my Elsie-Jean income was really quite lavish then. My first novel, of course, was *A Queer Kind of Death,* published in 1966 by Simon and Schuster.

EQMN: Who is Pharoah Love *really?*

BAXT: Pharoah Love is a creation of my imagination, though physically he is one of the former denizens of Elaine's bar who used to be in the music industry. But the others in the book are based on real people. Ida, of course, is Elaine. Seth Piro is mostly myself.

EQMN: Busby Berkeley choreography always struck me as sinister. How did you come to think to use it in *Swing Low, Sweet Harriet?*

BAXT: Swing Low is actually based on the William Desmond Taylor murder case—I'm thinking of writing a fact book on this—but I substituted a Busby Berkeley clone because I've always wanted to write a musical and this was the closest I could get. Harriet, for example, I based on the early talkies star, Alice White. Berkeley's choreography can indeed be sinister, as witness the "Lullaby of Broadway" number. From what I've read about him, there was obviously a sadistic streak in him. After all, he did stand trial for running down and killing someone during the mid-Thirties.

EQMN: Were you born in Brooklyn?

BAXT: Yes, in the Brownsville section, on Monday in the late afternoon, June 11, 1923, making me very Gemini. I was supposed to be twins. Where I was born was a hotbed of gangsterism and in 1929 my father bought a grocery store in the Canarsie area bordering Jamaica Bay. Canarsie was surrounded by swamps and mosquitoes, predominantly Irish Catholic and Italian with a smattering of Jews, and thoroughly isolated. It's what stirred my imagination at Public School 115 and I wrote several playlets that were produced—directed by and starring me—in the school auditorium. I remember one was about the building of the Panama Canal and the discovery of the yellow-fever vaccine. There were deaths, but not premeditated.

EQMN: How large a family were you?

BAXT: I had an older brother, now deceased, and have two older sisters. My mother is ninety-four years old.

EQMN: Do you write quickly?

BAXT: If I write slowly, I don't write. I don't sit at the typewriter until I've spent hours, days, weeks, ever

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months thinking out the plot line. Sometimes, as in the case of short stories, the resolve—by which I mean the wrapup or the end twist—comes to me at once; then it's a simple matter of building up to it. It takes me four to six hours to write a short story, and that's non-stop, pausing only to answer the phone—and quite curtly! *Queer Kind,* however, I mulled for years, beginning in London around 1960 and finally seeing it all falling into place in 1965, when I dropped the London background and substituted New York and what the late Anthony Boucher called its "homosexual underworld."

I wrote that book in under two weeks. I remember finishing it on a Wednesday night, bringing the manuscript Thursday morning to my agent with great fear and trepidation—I'd never written a novel in my life, or a short story, but my training came from the numerous screen treatments I wrote—and the following Tuesday afternoon he phoned triumphantly to tell me he'd sold it to Robert Gottlieb, who was then at Simon and Schuster. As a result, *Harriet* and *Topsy and Evil* took no time at all to write. But the others took longer. Much longer—much much much much.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

When Ellery Queen's gerontological novel *Inspector Queen's Own Case* was published in 1956, serious treatments of the problems of retirees were rare in mystery fiction. In the years since, many senior citizens have proven their continued usefulness in mystery novels, often through detection and sometimes through crime.

All these novels have been well intended, no doubt, but some have fallen victim to sentimentality or cutesiness. This issue's headliner is one of the best of the breed—and one of the finest paperback originals I've read in recent years.

**** L. A. Morse: *The Old Dick,* Avon, $2.25. Jake Spanner is a 78-year-old private eye who reluctantly comes out of retirement to help an old adversary recover his kidnaped grandson. The novel's view of old age manages to be unsentimental and uncompromising yet optimistic and good-humored. Spanner is a beautifully drawn character; the plot of his case has well concocted twists and turns, and the Canadian author obviously knows Los Angeles very well.

*** B. M. Gill: *Suspect,* Scribners, $9.95. As in her Edgar-nominated *Death Drop,* Gill comes to grips with the emotional impact of sudden death on those left behind, a subject surprisingly little explored in detective fiction. Though the windup of this tale of a series of murders of hospital-staff members does not quite measure up to what has gone before, there is a suggestion in the fine style and effective characterization that Gill may one day join Ruth Rendell and P. D. James in an unbeatable

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triumverate of female British mystery writers.

*** Ruth Rendell: *Death Notes,* Pantheon, $9.95. The durable subject of imposture—complete with references to the Tichborne claimant—is at the center of Rendell's own new novel, not one of her best but enlivened as always by good writing, interesting characters, and inventive plot ideas. (Chief Inspector Wexford's American holiday is above average for such forays by British sleuths.)

*** Wessel Ebersohn: *Divide the Night,* Pantheon, $10.95. Ebersohn's South African scene makes comparison with James McClure inevitable. He is more overtly angry and political than McClure in his savage satire on his country's society. He seems far less interested in doing a real detective novel, though his plot has its moments. Psychologist Yudel Gordon is a complex and well developed character. Ebersohn may lose some readers with one particularly sickening and degrading torture scene.

*** Ritchie Perry: *Fool's Mate,* Pantheon, $10.95. British agent Philis pulls hazardous escort duty for a former mistress of Idi Amin. It's smooth, well paced spy stuff with a nice leavening of humor. Though less fantastic than Ian Fleming, Perry decidedly belongs to the action rather than the cerebral school of espionage fiction.

*** William Marshall: *Sci Fi,* Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, $10.95. Marshall presents a doubly exotic setting, a science-fiction convention in Hong Kong, as the Yellowthread Street police hunt a murderous spaceman complete with ray gun. It's basically a black farce with a nice action windup. *EQMM* readers who enjoy Jack Ritchie's Turnbuckle series and Ron Goulart's show-biz stories will find scenes here to delight them.

** E. V. Cunningham: *The Case of the Sliding Pool,* Delacorte, $10.95. Beverly Hills homicide specialist Masao Masuto is a likeable sleuth and the veteran Cunningham (better known as Howard Fast) is a smooth storyteller. But Masuto is awfully intuitive and a trifle too lucky in the investigative (though not always the preventive) aspects of his job. Coincidence overwhelms the intriguing plot, and a hokey climax out of James Bond is followed by another out of Philo Vance.

Notable among the reprints is Hillary Waugh's 1964 novel *The Missing Man* (Harper and Row, Perennial Library, $2.40), one of the series about Police Chief Fred Fellows and as fine a police procedural as I've ever read. It could serve as a model of the type. Unfortunately, Waugh seems to have abandoned both Fellows and the police procedural—a demonstration of just how unfortunate that is can be seen in his feeble private-eye novel *The Glenna Powers Case* (Raven House, $2.25).

There are strong new entries in each of America's three major mystery anthology series. *Best Detective Stories of the Year—1981* (Dutton, $12.50), edited by Edward D. Hoch, has sixteen fine stories (including eight from *EQMM,* four from *AHMM),* highlighted by Clark Howard's haunting "Horn Man," Edgar winner for the best of 1980. Dutton is abandoning the series after thirty-five volumes, but Hoch will continue it in 1982 with a new title *(Year's Best Mystery and*

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Suspense Stories) and a new publisher (Walker). Appropriately, though perhaps coincidentally, the Fall/Winter 1981 edition of *Ellery Queen's Anthology* (Davis, $2.25; also available in hardcover as *Ellery Queen's Eyes of Mystery,* Dial Press, $9.95) salutes the Dutton series with nineteen *EQMM* stories that were chosen for *Best Detective Stories* volumes between 1963 and 1977. Busy editor Hoch is also responsible for the latest Mystery Writers of America anthology, *All But Impossible* (Ticknor and Fields, $14.95), devoted to locked-room and impossible-crime stories—some classics, some little known, all well worth reading: Here, too, *EQMM* tales predominate. Is anyone surprised?

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"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

A READER'S STORY

(With apologies to Clement Clark Moore)

by Phyllis Carson

'Tis the night before Thursday
(A night solely mine!)
This is Dad's night for bowling,
Which suits me just fine.
The children are all tucked in bed for the night
The moment has come for my Special Delight.
Some chocolates are placed by my favorite chair;
All lights are turned off but the reading lamp there.
In night robe and slippers I'm cozy and warm,
Enjoying the eerie effect of a storm,
Of rumbling thunder and flashes of light.
The setting is perfect! The mood is just right!
I curl up and open a small magazine—
My favorite mysteries—my *Ellery Queen!*

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Harry Coyle killed his wife Aggie forty-seven times, and not once did she suffer the least discomfort. When the forty-eighth opportunity presented itself, Harry remembered that "simplicity is the ultimate refinement of cunning" . . .

TOYSHOP OF THE MIND

by THOMAS OTTER

Nobody could say that he hadn't prepared himself to make use of his big chance when it finally came. The way some men take to crossword puzzles or chess problems for mental diversion Harry Coyle had exercised his ingenuity in devising elaborate schemes for killing his wife. Time and again during the past few years his Aggie had teetered over the brows of cliffs, expired gently of asphyxiation in the garage, hurtled down the cellar stairs, stepped in front of speeding trucks, electrocuted herself in the bathtub, swallowed sleeping tablets by the bottle—why, in a flamboyantly romantic moment she had even gone so far as to dress in white lawn and drown in the garden pool, quacked over pensively by the mandarin ducks.

She had died in exactly forty-seven ways in Harry's imagination without suffering the least discomfort in the flesh. He was too cautious to act before the time had ripened. Too smart.

Means were not his problem; means were a pleasure—a sort of toyshop of the mind for him to browse in at leisure. Motive was the poser. Who else would want to kill Aggie? No one else knew her well enough.

Harry realized that when a woman with no known enemies and almost half a million dollars in the bank dies under unusual circumstances, the police take a minute and solicitous interest in her husband. Cynics all, they are able to look at a grief-stricken widower and see a free man with money in his pockets. They take particular pleasure in breaking down carefully rigged alibis, relying, in the wisdom of their experience, on the conviction that nobody can really be in two places at the same time.

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If only someone else had a clear motive for killing Aggie! Harry knew that he could scarcely hope to avoid all suspicion, but he felt sure that he could stand up to whatever came, provided the searchlight was not directed on him and him alone.

Let the police rummage in his background to their heart's content—he had never put a foot wrong. In the eyes of outsiders he and Aggie rubbed along more comfortably than many husbands and wives. None of their friends knew how desperately he longed to go places and do things—to get far away from the big house on Moss Street and enjoy some of that pile of money rotting in the bank. None of them could see him wince inwardly every time Aggie referred to his photographic processing shop as "Harry's hobby" or "the way Harry earns his cigarette money." Presumably none of them quite realized that, if it weren't for the shop, he wouldn't get any cigarette money, although Aggie made it clear to one and all that his earnings were far from enough to "maintain Daddy's house."

And "maintain Daddy's house" was about what they did—the sum and substance of their lives. Old man Morland must be chuckling in his grave over the cheap caretaker his daughter had found. Lucky Harry! He had married Agnes Morland the heiress—Agnes Morland the house-proud heiress with the education and outlook of a charwoman turned food-faddist.

Although the Morland heiress was no beauty, she still enjoyed in her late thirties a kind of cozy good looks. She was one of those petite, pink-and-white women who forever seem to be on the point of bursting out of their skins—not fat, just pneumatic and well-scrubbed, plump enough to take pleasure in constant dieting. Decidedly, Harry was a lucky man.

He was also a patient man. At last his patience was rewarded. Good old Aggie—bless her plump and frosty heart!—came through in magnificent style: she gave a nameless young man with violent habits a perfectly splendid motive for killing her.

In fact, the motive was so compelling that Harry was tempted to wait and give his unknown benefactor time to make a move. But although this young man had already killed once, his technique did not inspire confidence. He had shot Dr. Soderman in his office over on Pine Street. Aside from killing his man, he had done virtually nothing right. He had been interrupted before he could lay hands on the narcotics he was presumed to have killed for. And there was worse to come: he had rushed from the office leaving behind his revolver and an eyewitness to his identity.

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The eyewitness was Aggie.

For more than a year Aggie had been seeing Dr. Soderman at least once a week. Hypochondria had become her one form of extravagance; even though she looked as sleek and healthy as a milk-fed shoat, she was suddenly full of vague complaints about "my head" or "my back" and ominous references to "the change of life."

On the day of the murder she had arrived a few minutes early for a two o'clock appointment. She found the waiting room empty and the door to the consulting room standing open. A little surprised, she called out to the doctor and started in to see if he was there. Just as she reached the doorway, a man in his early twenties with long blond hair and wearing a tan windbreaker "appeared out of nowhere," brushed past her, darted across the waiting room, and burst out the door to the street.

Aggie found Dr. Soderman lying stretched out on his back behind the examination table with blood on his shirtfront. She noticed a revolver on the floor between the standing scale and the narcotics cabinet. Then she came over faint and had to return to the waiting room and sit down. A minute or two later, just as she was about to phone the police, Marcia Galt, the doctor's receptionist, returned from her lunch.

These were the bare bones of Aggie's story as the public read it in the *Chronicle* the next morning. The central fact was all that mattered to Harry: there was a rather nasty type at large in the city who had reason to believe that Aggie was his one-way ticket to a murder conviction. Furthermore, he now knew that Mrs. Harry Coyle of 379 Moss Street was assisting the police in their investigations, as the formula goes.

Too bad the *Chronicle* didn't print a map to show him how to reach the house! The police were not at all pleased about the publicity; Lieutenant Dimmock made that clear when he brought Aggie home from her first session with the mug books down at headquarters.

"That was a very foolish thing your wife did, Mr. Coyle. She shouldn't have talked to that reporter."

Harry knew Dimmock slightly, though he hadn't realized that he was a policeman. He lived over on Cannon around the corner from the shop and had brought rolls of film in for processing four or five times. A mountain of a man with sad eyes and a pendulous mustache, he resembled a compassionate walrus, and his manner invested the blandest statement with awful forebodings.

Harry was careful to comply with the lieutenant's instructions.

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He kept all doors and windows locked and strolled frequently to the mailbox on the corner and back with his eye peeled for anyone loitering about—not so much for a young man in a tan windbreaker as for older, heavier men of the lieutenant's own breed. It had occurred to him that the police might have put the house on Moss Street under protective surveillance. That could be sticky. Better not ask, but he had to know.

By the evening of the second day Harry was sure that no one was watching the house. It was time to act—time to put in effect one of the murder schemes he had been concocting in a vacuum for so long. Plan 32B seemed tailor-made to suit the habits and style of a violent young junkie. It was simple and crude; it involved a blow to the head with a weapon heavy enough to kill without being hard and sharp enough to break the skin. Harry was a bit squeamish about blood. He was particularly finicking about getting it on his clothes when a murder investigation was about to begin.

While Aggie was occupied in preparing what a dietician in her favorite magazine was pleased to call dinner, he slipped down to the basement and removed his loafers and calf-length socks. He then slid one sock inside the other, filled the double-strength bag he had made about two-thirds full of sand from the pile he kept to spread on the driveway in winter, and tied a firm knot at the open end. A sockful of sand. He had read about such a weapon and thought about it (what lethal instrument hadn't he thought about over these past four or five years?) but he had never realized what a satisfying heft one had in the willing hand.

He took a few swipes at the empty air. He smiled and stepped back into his loafers. Slowly, intently, he brought his right hand back and then let go with all his force against an old mattress, which was leaning against the basement wall. The thud was solid, gratifying.

"What are you doing down there, Harry?"

He didn't answer, knowing that no answer was expected. Aggie's questions were really oblique accusations. What she meant was: you shouldn't be down there, you should be somewhere else.

"How many times do I have to tell you dinner's ready?"

He refrained from pointing out that she had not, in fact, mentioned dinner at all before. He felt positively warm toward Aggie and her little foibles this evening. If she hadn't been so stingy, there might have been a light on in the front hall to keep him from leaving his sock of sand behind the vase on the table by the door. There might

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even have been a live-in maid or cook, which would have been cripplingly inconvenient. Her little ways had their uses, their good points.

He bolted his cottage cheese, sugar-free canned pear, and tuna-pecan casserole with what almost amounted to relish. Even Aggie's dinner conversation, ordinarily a litany of shrill complaints and painstaking instructions, had taken a turn for the better. He couldn't hear too much about the young man in the tan windbreaker.

The dishes were, by tradition, Harry's task. Ordinarily a humiliating bore, this evening doing them became a kind of ritual: last rites for Aggie—he was washing her out of his life with scouring pad and detergent.

Now it was time. He wiped the sink, wrung out the dishcloth, and took a deep breath. From the living room a man's voice purred in those intimate tones we reserve for selling soap and automobiles. The TV. He would have to think of a way to pry her loose from the TV. He couldn't put his plan in operation with the back of her head sheltered by the big wing-backed armchair.

In the front hall it was darkish; an assailant to whom she had foolishly opened the door would be likely to overtake her in the hall. How could he lure her there? That shouldn't be hard: he could make use of her eternal anxiety about the state of "Daddy's house," the one emotion in her stronger than her affection for the tube.

He picked up the sock from the table and let it hang loosely from his hand down along the seam of his right trouser leg. Standing in the shadow, he looked into the living room, where he could make out, in the glow from the floor lamp, his wife's profile jutting past the wing of the overstuffed chair. Her lips were slightly parted; her eyes were fixed on the screen, watching two men beat up a third man and threaten to kill him.

"C'mere a minute, Aggie."

She took no notice; she heard but pretended not to hear. He had expected that. Now for the bait.

"There seems to be a crack opening in the ceiling over the stairs. Wonder what could be causing that? This house is too old to be still settling."

She was by him like a shot and without so much as a glance. He felt a little foolish, holding his weapon so carefully concealed. He could have brandished a butcher knife and bared his teeth in a fiendish grin for all the notice Aggie would have taken of him. Even being taken for granted has its advantages sometimes.

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"Where? I can't see it anywhere."

She had mounted the first step and was standing with her back to him, peering intently up into the gloom above. That spot right over the bun at the nape of her neck, where she pulls her hair up tight like her mind—just imagine there is a fly on that spot, he said to himself, as he rolled first back onto his heels and then forward onto the balls of his feet and swung his right arm in a smooth arc of gathering momentum. Swat it!

She pitched forward rigidly, like some squat heavy piece of furniture—a filing cabinet or an armchair—that had overbalanced. There was no blood, none that he could see. He grasped her wrist and lifted it. No pulse. No pulse at all. The arm dropped limply back to her side; and he stood looking down at her for a long minute, where she lay, face downward, slantwise up the bottom four stair treads. In the living room an adenoidal young woman was whining that her deodorant did not sustain her through a hard day at the office.

The TV? That must be left on, of course; she was watching it when her unknown killer rang the front doorbell. Harry reached his old mac down from the coat-tree. It was time to leave.

Letting the front door stand a bit ajar might be a realistic touch, just the sort of thing a violent young man might do in his haste to leave. Only a faint light shone from within, and the hedge obscured the view of casual passers-by. Still, there was room for hope that some acquaintance dropping by or some curious stranger might find the body before his return. That, he thought, would remove him one step further from the center of the investigation.

The night was moonless. Keeping in the shadow of the house cast by the street lamp at the corner, he headed for the long back yard, which ran all the way through to Elm Street. There he gave up the shadow of the house for the shadow of the lilac hedge that bounded their property—his property now—on the side toward the Gregsons. As he walked he emptied sand, a bit here and a bit farther on, from the sock onto the bare ground under the lilacs, until the sock was empty.

Emerging from the shadow of the hedge, he turned left on Elm and strolled the three short blocks to his shop. He passed nobody he knew, but he wouldn't have minded if he had. His behavior was normal; his plan did not call for artificially precise alibis or nice calculations of time. He intended to enjoy the vague and ambiguous alibi of an innocent man.

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Coyle's Photo Processing was on a second floor, above Nadine's Beauty Salon: Perms and Rinses. Harry let himself in, climbed the stairs, and snapped on the light, knowing that it would shine through the front windows down onto the sidewalk below. No harm in that. People were used to seeing him up there at work, as they thought, during the evenings. None of them knew that he was merely using the shop as a means of escaping his wife and spent most of those overtime hours reading paperback mystery novels.

He drew the two socks from the pocket of his mac and hurried to the deep sink he used for washing prints. As soon as he had carefully removed all the remaining grains of sand he could find from the inner sock and watched the grains swirl down the drain, he sat down, removed his loafers, pulled the socks on, removed two blonde hairs from them that stood out with startling distinctness against the black nylon, and finally eased back into his loafers with a barely audible sigh followed by a smile.

Only then did he take time to pull off his raincoat and begin to potter about. An order for a few color enlargements had been left that morning. Why not set to work and add a final touch of authenticity to his plan? It would be useful to be able to point to what had brought him to the shop on this particular evening and how he had spent his time.

Color printing takes concentration. For a time Harry managed to forget that this was not an evening like any other evening. After a while he no longer glanced anxiously at the phone every thirty seconds, wondering if it would ring, wondering when it would ring. He bent over his trays, watching the colors appear and blend. So absorbed was he, so forgetful, for the moment, of his crime, that the sound of the ground-floor door opening and shutting didn't register on his consciousness until heavy footsteps began to ascend the stairs.

Momentary panic coursed through him. If he had forgotten to lock the door below, what else had he forgotten that evening? There was so little to remember or forget, though. His panic transmuted itself instantly into exultation—a kind of arrogance. It had all been so straightforward, and simplicity is the ultimate refinement of cunning. There was nothing that could have gone wrong. Nothing at all.

The intruder was almost at the head of the stairs now, breathing heavily and calling out. Harry knew the voice: it was Lieutenant Dimmock. Someone must have found Aggie. What else?

The lieutenant was in the shop now. A little winded by the climb,

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he propped his elbows on the counter and leaned toward Harry. His great brown eyes were sadder than ever. He looked like a man laden with bad news.

"I was passing and noticed your light," he began; then he hesitated, as though unwilling to go on. He bent his head and peered intently at the yellow film cartons above the cash drawer.

"These aren't exactly business hours, Lieutenant, but if you need a roll of film, I'll be glad to oblige."

"That's not why I stopped. Maybe you'd better sit down, Mr. Coyle. I got something pretty bad to tell you."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, wondering if it would be smart to play the indignant citizen on the grounds that his wife had not been given police protection. No doubt that would be the natural line to follow. "There's nothing wrong at home, is there?"

"Depends on what you mean by wrong. There's something pretty terrible about your wife. Something I'd rather not have to tell you, but I felt the personal touch was called for. After all, I'm an old customer and practically a neighbor. That's why I stopped by. On impulse, sort of."

"My wife? What do you mean, my wife? If anything has happened to my wife, I hold the people who failed to protect her from this hoodlum responsible. It's only fair to tell you that."

The lieutenant seemed definitely embarrassed now. "I'm afraid I misled you a little there, Mr. Coyle. I had to."

"Misled me? Misled me about what?"

"I had to let you believe in the man in the tan windbreaker. So you'd act natural with Mrs. Coyle."

"Believe in him? Why the hell shouldn't I believe in him? Dr. Soderman's funeral tomorrow seems to me to be a good enough reason to believe in him. What sort of nonsense is this?"

The lieutenant shook his ponderous head. "I'm afraid not, Mr. Coyle. We were pretty sure he never existed from the beginning. If you were a cop, you'd know why. It didn't fit, none of it. Then, you see, that Galt girl, the receptionist, was sitting in her boy friend's car and had the street door in full view for more than ten minutes before she came back to the office. She didn't see anyone come out of it at all. I told you you'd better sit down."

Harry eased himself slowly into the swivel chair behind the desk where he kept his accounts. There was a grain of sand lodged in the fold of skin under his right big toe. It bothered him a little.

"But then who . . . ?"

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"Your wife, Mr. Coyle. Your wife. That's what I hated to tell you. You see, she and Dr. Soderman have been having an affair for a long time now. They thought they were being discreet, but not much gets past the Galt female. She keeps both ears to the ground while she tests the breeze with her nose, that one. She says that Dr. Soderman wanted to break it off, and your wife has been cutting up something fierce these past few weeks. We figure it as a crime of passion, as the French say."

Could it be Aggie this man was talking about? His Aggie? The Refrigerated Lady?

"There's no more room for doubt, I'm afraid. We traced the gun earlier this evening. She bought it as close by as Stockton, right over the counter. Should have known we'd be on to that in a hurry."

The lieutenant sounded a bit aggrieved, as if underestimating the efficiency of police procedure were far from the least of Aggie's delinquencies.

"Two of my men dropped me here and drove on over to pick her up. We should be hearing from them in a minute or two. I figured I'd like to prepare you a little, ease some of the shock. I'm afraid you won't have your wife with you any more, Mr. Coyle," the lieutenant said with another shake of his head. "At least, she'll leave you pretty well fixed, I hear," he added, searching—not very tactfully, it's true—for a silver lining.

The telephone rang.

NEXT ISSUE . . .

14 *NEW* stories—including

HUGH PENTECOST (about Pierre Chambrun)

MICHAEL GILBERT (about a detective of disbursements)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Simon Ark)

GEORGE BAXT (about a lonely, wealthy widow)

SIMON BRETT (about escape routes)

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a *NEW* short story by

JOHN STORM ROBERTS

Join Tod Taverner, Gent., and Silver Stripes and Spoon on a dangerous sail on a dingy gray day with a dingy gray sea and a dingy gray sky, the wind howling, the rain drenching, the water heaving . . . Bon voyage!

ONE POINT TOO FAR

by JOHN STORM ROBERTS

At first all I saw was about a hundred thousand dollars' worth of boat with a badly set mainsail and a big genoa that was trying to thrash itself apart. Amateur yachtsmen are common enough around New Essex, but not at dawn on a chilly day with on-and-off squalls and the wind from the north. So I crooked my knee over the tiller of my outboard motor and took a look through my binoculars.

You don't see that many hundred-grand yachts around New Essex. Especially not at six o'clock on gray, damp mornings. And super-especially not being sailed by gorgeous birds in their early twenties. So I had no trouble recognizing the person at the helm. It helped that she was wearing the same blouse as the night before, a shiny, low-necked job with black and silver stripes six inches wide. Didn't go with the yacht, though it suited her seamanship well enough from what I could see.

I'd discovered New Essex my second summer in the States while I was interviewing a local expatriate for a London paper and I'd been spending the odd three-day weekend there for the last couple of years. It was a bit like the part of Britain I'd fished and sailed in as a boy—the same kind of flat countryside; and the village itself was like small English holiday resorts—sand on the roadway and kids wandering around in swimsuits carrying buckets and fishing

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rods. There was even the obligatory pub serving the weekend mariners, the Captain's Table. That was where I'd last seen the black and silver blouse.

It hadn't been hard to spot. The Captain's Table mostly pulls a fairly young crowd at nights, but it's not what you'd call chic. So when this smashing creature came loping in looking as though she'd made the wrong turning on East 70th Street, I stopped brooding about tomorrow morning's pre-breakfast fishing trip, and started meditating the possibility of a night catch.

My basic problem was logistics. She'd fetched up at a table overlooking the harbor as far away as possible from where I was propping up my usual end of the bar—the one with the invisible sign saying Tod Taverner, Gent. Problem: how to eliminate the intervening twenty feet or so of browsers and sluicers without looking too blatant about it. Even for a Brit in a land where the myth of the English Gentleman still hangs on, just marching over and plunking myself down next to Silver Stripes would definitely rank as blatant.

Of course, I could try the wasn't-it-you-I-saw-this-afternoon-in-that-fetching-little-ketch number, but this one looked as though she'd just think I was talking baby talk about the stuff you put on hamburgers. She obviously wasn't off a boat. Even the kind of women that lie around in bikinis on the decks of motor cruisers get themselves up nautical to hit the Captain's Table, and that blouse was definitely urban.

I was contemplating Line B—"Excuse me, but didn't I see you at the Buckingham Palace Garden Party last year"—when the whole issue became academic. A chap in an expensive French fisherman's sweater came in, she gave him a wave, and I stopped dreaming.

The new chum was middle-aged and medium-tall and built like a middle-aged swinger who can afford a lot of exercise. He had rather bogus silver clumps of hair at his temples and an equally bogus tan. He looked to me like a dentist with delusions of grandeur, but then the Indians probably didn't think the U.S. cavalry looked all that ducky, either.

Jeff, the owner, was down the other end of the bar serving a bunch of rowdy kids from Stony Brook University, so I sulked in my beer for a while. But when he shook himself loose and glanced in my direction I gave him a jerk of the head and he came shuffling over, ducking his head to avoid the wine glasses that hung from driftwood thingies aloft.

"More beer, Tod?"

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"I haven't had any yet." This routine dated from one of those boring arguments about American versus British beer. He was probably as tired of it as I was, but some rituals develop a life of their own.

When he came back with my glass, I nodded casually at the table by the window where Silver Stripes and Silver Temple had their heads together.

"Look a little out of place, don't they? Any idea who they are?"

"Fella's a guy called Teleman. Lives up Cos Cob way, but drops in here now and again. Sails a big black-hulled two-master worth ten years of you and me. Lovely thing."

"Chap seems to go in for lovely things."

Jeff chortled. "Got the itch, Taverner?" He stared across at Silver Stripes past the sea of talking heads at the other tables. "Watch it, buster! She looks like kind of a tough cookie to me." He drifted back down to the other end of the bar to quell Young Stony Brook, who were showing signs of bursting into song. I drank my second beer and daydreamed a bit more, and then pushed off home to bed. High tide was at six the next morning, and I wanted to be out as early as the fish.

I got up around dawn and decided to give the bluefish round Winkler's Island a fright. It was raining half-heartedly and the only living thing I met on the way to Captain Adolph's was a cat snacking on a fishhead under a laid-up cruiser. I took a sixteen-foot aluminum boat that already had its outboard mounted, and made it out to Winkler's Island about half an hour before dawn.

I had a couple of hours of tide in hand, but the wind was creating a lot of choppy water and the blues were apparently in a huff about it. I fished for the blighters and I trolled for 'em, and finally I gave up and went prospecting for porgies on the bottom, and caught as many of those as I'd caught of blues. And then the rain started coming down in buckets. Not being one for getting wet to no purpose, I started to cross the Sound to Simpson's Island, where there's a diner down by the slips that opens early for breakfast.

I was halfway there when I saw Silver Stripes in the black-hulled yacht. Jeff had been right. It was a lovely thing—a thirty-footer with a cockpit set between two cabins. The kind of boat you can sail single-handed, if you know what you're doing.

Silver Stripes obviously didn't. At first sight she didn't seem to be in any trouble except general amateurism, and I assumed Tele-

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man would show up from below any moment. I changed my mind when an extra heavy wave lifted the yacht's stern out of the water.

What you do when you get into trouble on Long Island Sound is, you lower sail and come into shore under motor. Unless your propeller has a couple of turns of some kind of hawser round it, and one of the blades has snapped off short. The way hers did.

She only had to down sails and anchor till help arrived, but even an experienced sailor has to move fast to lower mainsail and jib and drop anchor singlehanded in confined waters. Whatever Silver Stripes might be experienced in, it wasn't sailing—and if she wasn't singlehanded she certainly believed in letting her crew get their sleep.

So I stowed my binoculars and pushed Captain Adolph's baking tin up to full speed, so we met in the middle of the Sound. Luckily Silver Stripes still had her fenders out. I got hold of one of them and managed to take a turn with my painter round the yacht's mainstays. After that, getting on board only took the skill of a pirate and the intelligence of a suicidal maniac.

Once I'd made it, I grabbed the wheel, took the mainsheet, and yelled at Silver Stripes to tighten the jib. Then I put the helm hard over to beat back to the marina, one eye on the burgee and one ear cocked for gratitude.

What I got was a nasty surprise. For a couple of moments she gawped at me. Then she said something very rude indeed and snatched at the wheel.

I had enough to handle without hand-to-hand combat, so I let the yacht fall off the wind until we were back on her original course, and got ready to be diplomatic.

"Listen, dear lady," I said, "you just haul in that ruddy jib and don't argue. This thing isn't a Pinto; she's a big boat with a broken propeller. We take her back before you get into any more trouble."

I was expecting backchat. What I got was a soft voice about two feet behind me.

"Wrong!" it said.

Journalism and sailing have one thing in common. The outrageous becomes routine. So instead of letting go of everything and landing us up on Mulligan's Rock, which was a couple of hundred feet on our port bow loaded down with seagulls, I just took a look over my shoulder.

The man behind the voice was leaning awkwardly against the rear cabin door with his right arm wrapped up in an improvised

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sling. But not so awkwardly that he didn't have free play for the automatic in his left hand.

"Pay attention, fella," he said. "You're awful close to that lump of land."

He wasn't wrong. Turning round to look at him, I'd hauled down on the wheel, and Mulligan's seagulls had taken to the hills.

When I'd sorted that out, I took a quick look around in search of help. But the rain had set in solid, and there wasn't a boat in sight.

"Just keep going," the voice behind me said. It sounded amused, which didn't make me feel any better. One of the nastiest people I'd ever met had been so twinkly and humorous you'd have thought he was Santa Claus on a diet.

So far I hadn't seen anything of this fellow except his sling and his gun, but now he shuffled cautiously round me and sat down in the forward end of the cockpit.

He wasn't particularly impressive, with one arm held up by a decidedly second-hand tie, and sandy hair plastered down by the rain, but his pistol was a decidedly professional-looking Walther PPK.

He grinned at me in a smug sort of way.

"Glory," he said. "See if you can find us anything to keep the damn rain out, hunh?"

"Him too?" she asked, giving me a very nasty look.

"Why not? Man can't take us where we're going if he has pneumonia."

Given that pneumonia takes a couple of days to develop, I didn't like the sound of that, but the wind was still freshening and the bows were beginning to dig into the rollers, so I concentrated on letting out some main sheet.

After a while Silver Stripes came back with a couple of oilskins with hoods, and a scruffy-looking nylon raincoat and yachting cap for me.

"This is all I could find, Spoon," she said.

I lifted an eyebrow at him.

"Spoon? Tea or table?"

He grinned at me.

"I just love the British sense of humor."

Silver Stripes, meanwhile, had got herself into her oilskins.

"Gimme the piece and put this thing on," she said to the dude Spoon. "We don't need you getting sick either, with that arm of yours."

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While Spoon was climbing into his oilskins, I mulled over the chances of jumping her. She slitted her eyes at me and raised the Walther so I could see down the barrel. I never could abide psychics.

Spoon took back the automatic from Silver Stripes.

"Okay, Glory, get behind the man and steer this thing while he garbs up. Just slide away from in front of her real dignified fella."

Glory dropped the scruffy raincoat and the yachting cap on the deck of the cockpit and took over the wheel, I put them on, and there we were.

When I'd got the wheel back from Silver Stripes again I took a good look around me. With the wind almost on our tail we were already level with Montauk Point. Apart from the lighthouse there was nothing in sight but a couple of buoys, half a dozen seagulls, and rain, rain, rain.

I decided it was time to open negotiations.

"Listen," I said. "I'm putting in to Montauk. You can't tell me you're going to murder the only person on board who can sail."

Spoon sort of twinkled at me.

"Glory, take over again. Fella, there's a message for you in the front cabin."

The cabin was full of polished wood and brass, with a bunk down either side and a folding table in the middle. The table was tipped over at an angle, and Teleman was leaning against it and staring at me in an uninterested way. His silver hair was as distinguished as ever, but his tan was yellowish in the half light, and his expensive French fisherman's sweater was never going to be the same again. Not with the big brownish-red stain on the front, about level with where his heartbeat used to be.

I backed out gently and looked at Spoon. He grinned at me.

"What's one more?" he asked. Well, I can count, but I was in no mood to give him lip. I went back and took over the wheel from Silver Stripes.

"Dear lady," I said softly in her ear. "You don't know what you're getting yourself into. The chap in that cabin is dead."

She thought that was terrific. I stood there aiming the boat at Ireland and feeling like an idiot while she cackled, and told Spoon what I'd said, and he cackled. But his gun didn't cackle. It went on staring at my poor delicate tum.

Finally Spoon pulled himself together.

"Sorry about that, fella. Little hysteria going around. The lady canceled a couple of narcs in a bust in New Rochelle yesterday,

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which was only fair since they was trying to cancel us. But what with one thing and another, we're short on sleep. So just do as you're damn told, will you? We may be in trouble if you don't—but nothing to the trouble you'll be in."

This time he didn't grin at me.

For a while nothing happened except that the rain rained, and Montauk Point waved us goodbye, Silver Stripes dozed in a corner of the cockpit, and Spoon's Walther stared at me. The wind was holding just below one-reef strength, though I had the impression that it wasn't going to last. I kept us on course for Europe, which didn't take much doing, and tried to think of a way out, which did.

What with the rain and the wind, nobody but a fanatic fisherman would be out, and a fanatic would know that it was a rotten day for fish. There were often tankers and freighters and thisers-and-thaters around, but even if one passed close enough, how was I going to attract its attention without Spoon shooting me in the interests of discipline? I might have engineered some kind of collision, but there was nothing to collide with except a big Shell tanker a mile or so off, and if I rammed her we'd be filleted by her screws without her even noticing us.

All in all, it was turning out a rotten day.

After another hour or so Spoon peered around us. Ireland was still out of sight, but America had dwindled to an uneven black border between the dingy gray sea and the dingy gray sky.

"Okay," he said to me. "Turn south."

I thought for a moment.

"You'll have to let the jib out. The wind'll be astern."

"Gee, you do talk pretty. Hey, Glory, Sir Francis Drake here needs you."

He grinned at me.

I was liking Spoon less and less. About the best you could say, he wasn't as bad as a whimsical sadist I'd once run across in Kenya, whose idea of a joke was to kick all your teeth in and then offer you a lemon drop. All I had against Spoon was that he grinned smugly and had much too steady a hand with a Walther. But that was enough. With the wind astern, things got a good deal wetter, and the yacht took to pitching nastily. Silver Stripes got seasick, which was the first nice thing that had happened all day. Spoon and his Walther just sat and looked at me.

The first thing that's needed in any project is background research. So when Silver Stripes took to the cabin for a while, I tried ques-

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tioning Spoon. It wasn't particularly difficult. He was the chatty type of thug and very full of himself.

"The tropical island of San Andres, Captain," he said when I asked him where we were headed. "The late Mr. Teleman notwithstanding, we have business to transact."

"Oh, really? Pirate gold, I suppose?"

Spoon sniggered. "Yo ho ho," he said. "White gold."

"Coke, eh?" I tried to look worldly. "How come the yacht?"

"New trade route, Captain. Outsmarting the competition. Not to say the opposition."

What with interruptions from the weather and Spoon's need to work a gag a minute into his narrative, it took a while for me to get the whole picture. When I got it, I disliked it.

The new trade route, it seemed, involved avoiding the informers and police in the usual connection ports by bringing the stuff over to San Andres, which is apparently a little English-speaking island off the Colombian coast, picking it up in a legitimate charter yacht, filling said yacht up with tourists, and bumming around for several weeks before making for home. No calls at known drug ports, no sinister rendezvous at sea, just a tourist couple with a little something extra in their bags. I gather the trick was to transfer the stuff somewhere equally outside the usual routes, drift back to Connecticut like any weekend sailor, and drop it off in New Rochelle. Teleman, it seems, was part of the money, and kept clear of the rest of the operation.

"So what went wrong?" I asked.

"Little leak in the pipeline. Narc busted the dropoff point just as me and Glory were arriving to pick up the green yesterday."

He pulled a face and fell silent for a moment.

"And?" I didn't want him to lose the flow. If all this didn't turn into my funeral oration, it might turn into a scoop.

Spoon brightened.

"Lemme tell you about Glory some time! She spots something wrong as I pull into the driveway and yells at me to split. I make a tight circle, but they've got the big iron gate shut by then, and there's stuff popping all over. 'The hedge,' she yells, so I barrel through the shrubbery while she blows a couple of narcs down with a shotgun while they're chopping away at us with automatics. That's where I got the shoulder—"

"How did you get here?"

Spoon grinned.

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"Glory again. She figured Teleman'd slip us out of the country for a while, being we know who he is and all. So we ditch the limo and pick up Glory's compact and take the ferry over here, no sweat, and I hide out on the boat while Glory goes to see Teleman. She'd call him on the way—fella lives over Smithtown way. Happy ending, till the cat says he won't take us on no yacht of his to fetch no blow. Conversation got a little heated toward the end, and Glory pulled a gun. Cat tried to grab it and lost interest very rapid. So there we were. Me with one arm and no idea about boats, and Glory who'd sailed maybe a couple of times with Teleman. And then you dropped by."

None of this made me any happier than I'd been before, but I didn't have much time to brood on it, because Spoon decided he was hungry and yelled for Silver Stripes. She appeared, looking greenish, and flatly refused to cook, but she took the helm while I fried up stuff out of cans I found in the galley and Spoon sat on the bunk watching me in case I drilled holes in the bottom of the boat or something. Teleman ignored us both. At some point the table had collapsed under him, and he was lying on the floor in a heap.

I spent the rest of the day dreaming up tactful ways to leave them alone together, and finally decided to try a run for it in Captain Adolph's sardine tin that night. I'd hitched it to the mainstays when I'd made my gallant damfool rescue attempt, and it was still bumping alongside.

Around dusk Spoon told me to do whatever needed to be done about navigation lights. They were operated by a row of switches on a panel near the wheel—three controlled riding lights, two more covered various maps, and deck lights, and something I didn't recognize, marked EPIRB. I had a vague idea in the back of my mind that I'd heard of it before, but it didn't seem to be relevant to the present situation.

We were still tearing along with the wind on our tail, slightly overcanvased but not enough to be dangerous. I was getting nervous about sailing blind, so after we'd eaten, Spoon and I went into the cabin again and I dug up a set of charts.

I wasn't much of a navigator, being mostly an up-the-coast-and-back-again sailor, but I knew enough to work out a number of things. One, we were about level with Atlantic City if we were lucky, and it was going to take us forever to reach the Gulf of Mexico under sail, never mind the Colombian coast. Two, the idea of these two

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lunatics collecting their white gold, never mind getting anywhere they could bank it, was a joke.

Unfortunately, three, my chances of being around to jeer at them were probably worse than nil. Once the weather slacked, there was a good chance even Silver Stripes and Spoon could take the yacht south by themselves. It was set up to sail singlehanded, with a lever to lock the wheel in position and cleats to hold the mainsheet if the helmsman wanted to go forward for a while. They'd be taking chances—but nothing like the chances they'd be taking with me and Teleman on board.

The same thought occurred to Spoon late that evening. We were up in the cockpit again, watching a light in the distance blink on and off, and eating sandwiches.

"Hey, gang," he said, grinning his aren't-I-cute grin. "What say we send old man Teleman home? He's in the way. You, Admiral Nelson! Find some kind of weight and get rid of the old jerk."

Getting rid of Teleman was altogether jolly. Before I'd hardly started, I got soaked poking around in the forepeak. The mudweight I found there was certainly heavy enough for the job, as I discovered when I slammed my hand against the edge of the forepeak hauling it up.

But the mudweight was nothing to Teleman himself. The only things I had on my side were that he was fairly skinny and that he was only just starting to stiffen up. On the other hand, skinny as he was he weighed a ton, and he was facing the wrong way round.

In the end I lugged him out by both legs, which was a lot harder than it sounds. He was wearing fancy rope-soled shoes without socks, but they came off when I started pulling on him. His skin felt like clammy plastic, and his feet under my nose while I dragged him lacked charm.

When I finally got him out into the cockpit, Spoon grinned at me. "Having fun?"

I was in no mood for wit. I just grunted and looked Teleman over, wondering how I could use him to get help. If I fixed things so the mudweight didn't stay put, somebody might find him and start a search. On the other hand, if anybody did find him they'd probably think he'd been ditched from the shore. On the third hand, I'd better do *something* or when the weather eased I'd probably find myself joining him.

Working all that out took me the fifteen seconds it took for Spoon to tell me to tie the rope under the man's arms. When I'd done it,

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he gave his gun to Silver Stripes and took a gander at my knot. Then he stood up and shook his head at me.

"And you a sailor?" he said. "You wanna do it again properly?"

So that idea went overboard along with Teleman.

About ten minutes later, so did my other one. Spoon stared at me for a while as we plowed through the night with the fine rain falling and the wind holding just under one-reef strength. Then he gave me another of those silly meaningless grins.

"Tell you what, fella, I'd like to make a little faster time. How about you cut loose that little old boat of yours in case Teleman needs it."

I did my best.

"*We* might need it."

"You mean *you* might need it. *We* got a couple more up there on the cabin top. Don't you fret, good buddy. When we're ready to let you go you won't need a boat."

Which thought made me feel even better.

It was about three o'clock that I got my next idea. We took turns to get some sleep, and I was half dozing and thinking about emergency measures when suddenly I remembered what the extra switch on the cockpit panel was for.

It had been in the Captain's Table one evening the previous year. A coast guard had been moaning to Jeff about some wild-goose chase he'd been on the night before.

"Damn EPIRB have their uses," he said.

"EPIRB? What's that?" Jeff had asked.

"Electronic emergency beacon. Flip the switch and it sends out an automatic distress signal. Fool in a big cruiser switched one on by mistake. Had six boats and a plane looking for him."

I was glad I remembered that conversation. Automatic distress signals were above my head as a weekend yachtsman, but I could see right away they had their uses. I had no difficulty tripping the thing. When I turned off the riding lights at dawn I simply flipped the EPIRB switch as well. The one thing that bothered me was that the coastguard might have problems pinpointing a moving target.

And moving we certainly were. The wind was freshening again, and by rights we should have taken in a reef, but I reckoned the rougher the passage, the safer I'd be. I didn't want Spoon to get the idea that he and Silver Stripes could manage without me.

It couldn't have been more than an hour before the plane showed up. It was almost overhead before we spotted it, because the clouds

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were thickening and the mist was coming up. The mainland wasn't visible at all.

It came in low, and circled us a couple of times. Spoon stared up at it and swore.

"Glory, get rid of 'em," he said. "And make it good!"

Silver Stripes gave the plane a chorus-girl wagging-wrist hi-de-hi that must have baffled the pilot completely. It was somewhat spoiled by the fact that water was beginning to break over our bows, but apparently it persuaded him we were okay. At any rate, the plane wagged its wings and made off back in the direction of the United States, taking the pit of my stomach with it. I just hoped the pilot hadn't diagnosed a faulty EPIRB.

We bucketed along for a while with the spray drenching us. The wind was shifting around, and the yacht was heeling so much it was getting hard to sit in the cockpit. Spoon was sliding all over the place. With one arm in a sling and his gun in the other, he had nothing to hold on with except his teeth, and they weren't much in evidence for a change. I hadn't seen him grin once since dawn. That made me a bit happier, and better still, it gave me another idea to work on.

Whatever the coastguard had thought of Silver Stripes' wave, it soon became clear that the EPIRB was still bothering them, because about ten minutes later the same plane swooped a hundred feet above us again. We could see the pilot looking down.

This time Spoon got rattled.

"Wave, damn you," he hollered at Silver Stripes. "You too, fella. Give the mother the thumb-up!"

Whatever the pilot made of all our flapping, he zoomed off again. But he'd upset Spoon thoroughly. He sat in one corner keeping himself in place with his feet and stared at me, the little wheels whirring behind his eyes.

Any moment now he was going to realize that they might be back with a boat next time. Which meant he'd better get rid of me. Which in turn meant I'd better move inconspicuously, but fast.

First I took a couple of turns of the mainsheet round a cleat, so that the yacht would keep sailing on its own if necessary. Then I gently headed our nose up into the wind till the mainsail started flapping. Then, when Spoon started glancing up at it, I hauled it till the flapping stopped. Then I eased our nose off the wind again, keeping the mainsail tight. Too tight for the new course.

What happens when you haul a mainsail in too tight is that your

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boat heels over. In that wind it heeled over so far that Silver Stripes had to use both hands to hold on with, and Spoon, with no hand free and his legs braced hard on the slanting deck, started to slide.

When the wind was dead abeam, which meant that the waves were coming into us sideways, I held the wheel steady, waiting for a big one.

The first couple of rollers lifted the yacht and let her drop. The next hit us just right. A plume of water soared up into the air and broke into the cockpit, soaking us.

Silver Stripes gave a squawk. Spoon swore. I clicked the wheel-lock lever into place and let go of the mainsheet.

The release of pressure on the sail did the rest. The yacht rolled wildly, Spoon's braced feet slipped, he went down on the floor of the cockpit, cracking his head on the way, and like a shot I jumped on top of him.

I didn't waste time being clever, just grabbed the gun, banged Spoon on the head with it, and tried to find a handhold in the confusion, wondering where Silver Stripes was.

She was right behind me. Just as I started getting up, she snatched the gun out of my hand. I made a grab for her legs, but she kicked me in the face and skipped up on the cockpit seat and from there onto the cabin roof.

So there we were. Me flat on my back with my head jammed against the wheel post, Silver Stripes kneeling on the cabin top perhaps eight feet away, holding the gun in both hands and aiming carefully.

Her first shot missed because the boat rolled, but her second one kicked a splinter of wood out of the deck next to me. I reached up with both hands, clicked off the wheel-locking lever, hauled down hard on one of the spokes of the wheel, and held on tight.

One thing every sailor dreads is a jibe all-standing. You only have to move the nose of the boat one point too far when the wind's behind you, and suddenly it's coming from your left-hand side instead of your right. If that happens unexpectedly, the sail, and the big heavy boom that runs along with it, swing over with enough force to break your mast.

For a moment nothing happened except that Silver Stripes grinned and took aim again. Then the yacht reacted, heeling heavily as her nose swung down wind. One point, and another, and another. And then one point too far.

The mainsail slapped once like the crack of doom.

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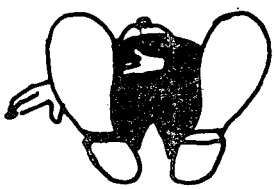
When the boom hit Silver Stripes, it must have been traveling at fifty miles an hour. It carried her ten feet outboard of the yacht, and dropped her.

The mast held, but it took me a couple of minutes to get things back under control. When there was no risk of a second jibe, I looked astern.

Silver Stripes was gone. All I could see was empty gray water and gray skin and gray mist. That, and a coastguard cutter homing in on my EPIRB, just a few minutes late.



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a *NEW* detective story by

THOMAS WALSH

The murder of John A. Knowlton on Long Island had long tentacles of investigation. That is why Inspector Malachi Hanrahan sent Detective Franklin Delano McCabe to the wilds of Utah, to the Mountainview Crest Motel, to pick up some loose threads in the background . . .

MEEK-AS-A-MOUSE McCABE

by THOMAS WALSH

It was about half-past two that afternoon when McCabe—Detective Franklin Delano McCabe, the night law student—got off the plane at the Salt Lake City Airport. An inexpensive rented sedan was waiting for him, as arranged by Inspector Malachi Hanrahan back in New York, and by a quarter to three Detective McCabe—wrinkled seersucker suit, thin serious face, hornrimmed reading glasses—closed Wiegmore on Torts, returned to his battered old suitcases his copy of Prosser on Evidence, and drove to the big interstate highway, heading west and south out of the city. Three hours later, and a hundred and fifty miles farther on, he entered the small town of Jenkins Grove, and turned off the highway at a sign that read: *Mountainview Crest—Reasonable Rates—Free Continental Breakfast—Mrs. Herbert R. Palmer, Prop.*

There was just the highway in front and a dozen or so neat-looking but rather old cabins. But the parking area was marked off trimly in white paint, and scattered about were attractive paintings of undersized cacti; and the young lady behind the desk appeared crisply businesslike in a simple white dress, a narrow black belt, and a glittering Navaho necklace.

"Sounds pretty good to me," Detective McCabe assured her, after

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being informed as to the rates in effect, the continental breakfast, and the available cabins—and, of course, after taking for himself a covert but sharp-eyed professional scrutiny. Very white teeth, the scrutiny informed him, complexion a rich ruddy gold from the desert sun, and manner as friendly and comfortable as Policewoman Gloria Fanning's was queenly, elegant, and altogether untouchable. "Now I might be around here for a week or two, because I'm trying to open up some territory for Johnson and Jones, the candy people. You ever try one of their Happy Holesome Nut Bars? It's our newest item and I can tell you it's the best."

But an inner door was jerked open then and a young girl of fifteen or so stamped out of it with an expression of fury on her face, and addressed the older girl in a hating and sullen manner, even with Detective McCabe present.

"Well, I don't care," she said as if continuing an argument that had been going on for some time. "I'm still going, Peggy Palmer, because I promised I would, so there. And why can't I? I simply defy you to give me one sensible reason, just one! Why can't I?"

So it's Peggy Palmer, Detective McCabe told himself. Fine, that settled one point anyway. The young lady in the white dress was second oldest in the Palmer family, the one left in charge here and the one next in line to her older sister back east—Mrs. John A. Knowlton, the well-known photographer's model of two years ago, but now the beautiful and bereaved widow. Knockouts, all the girls, even the kid. No wonder Malachi Hanrahan had called on Detective McCabe to handle this thing. Who else could he trust?

"Now I've told you before," Peggy Palmer said, while Detective McCabe stood unobtrusively to one side with his free gift box of Happy Holesome Nut Bars. "Mother left me in full charge here, and I'll have you over my knee in two seconds, big as you are, if you keep defying me like this. You just march straight back to your room, Miss Pert, because I happen to know all about this hayride you're talking about, and before I—"

Her eyes filled, her voice wobbled. But of course, Detective McCabe told himself, she was feeling the strain. She was old enough to understand the predicament her sister was in back East, if the kid did not. So—

She came around to him from the reservation desk.

"This way." She made an obvious effort to regain control over herself. "Just follow me, Mr. McCabe. I'll show you the cabins we have."

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And Detective McCabe did as requested, feeling that he had been given a rather illuminating introduction to the discipline in effect around here, the taboos and the restrictions. An hour later, safely installed as the newest resident of Cabin 7 at Mountainview Crest, he reported from a drugstore telephone to Malachi Hanrahan back in New York.

"Can't help feeling that maybe you got the wrong slant on this family," Franklin Delano told him. "The kid was only about fifteen, I'd say, so this Peggy sure put her foot down good and hard. Really used her head, I'd say."

"And apparently turned yours," Malachi growled at him. "Now you know I have the mother here with me defending and protecting her darling oldest, which gave us the chance, all on the Q.T., to find out just what kind of an establishment they're running out there. So keep your wits about you, Franklin. I don't doubt they're all fetching hussies, the lot of them—which is why I picked you for the job. You see the point, I suppose. Who else could I trust around them?"

"Yeah," Detective McCabe said, with quiet bitterness. "Right, Inspector. Steady and reliable McCabe, wasn't it? I'm not cut out for the great lover, am I? I make people laugh sometimes. I ought to feel complimented if a decent and respectable girl even looks at me."

"Ah, not at all, not at all, laddie," Malachi comforted him, much too offhand and casual about it. "Talk sense. You've got to understand that we're up against a pretty tough proposition here. Maybe this Mrs. Knowlton killed her husband by knocking him down that flight of steps in their house out on Long Island last week or maybe she didn't. We don't know yet, which is why we're only questioning her so far. But we do know that they hadn't been getting on together for some time, or even living together. And so far we haven't been able to prove that she even visited him at the house that night.

"So the way it appears now, Franklin, or else was made to appear, is that some prowler broke in and assaulted him. But if there is something else back of it—well, I've got to know about the wife, don't you see? She met up with a good piece of hard cash when she met up with Knowlton two years ago. And then she married him just three days later, which to my mind is always a damned suspicious thing. Do you wonder why I want to find out a little more about the woman, and what kind of a family she comes from?

"So the way it appears now, Franklin, is that some prowler broke into the place and assaulted him. But the truth is something else,

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laddie. Well, how about the beautiful and bereaved widow having something to do with it? Now we find out that she has two sisters, and a just too-sweet-to-be-true old mother, all of whom make a living for themselves by renting out rooms for the night to all comers. Well, maybe I'm just a bit old-fashioned about some matters. Very probably I am. But what I was expecting you to find out for me, and damned quick, was the character of the family, their standing in the community, and their general background.

"So don't trust to your own impression of them, because I don't doubt that they've all got the same delicate ways as the old lady, the same slim and appealing figure, and the same Jezebel cunning. Now tell me the truth, Franklin, own up and admit the thing. Did you get even the least hint today that the pretty Peggy was deliberately setting herself out to beguile and bewitch you?"

Something happened at that moment in Detective McCabe, the night law student. Sudden and uncontrollable venom flashed out of him in half an instant.

"Well, I can tell you this much," he announced breathlessly. "Everybody knows I'm meek-as-a-mouse Detective McCabe, the kind of man who's afraid even to look at a girl. But when I walked in there tonight and found this one looking up at me from the desk, I didn't feel exactly eighty-five years old, for some reason. All she had to do was to give me that one look, and ever since I've been—"

"Eh?" Inspector Hanrahan put in, his voice rising excitedly. "What are you talking about? I thought everything has been settled for three years between you and the Fanning woman. It's well known. You never look at another girl. You never even had one. You're steady, level-headed, devoted, hard-working, and ambitious. Now is that the fact, Franklin, or isn't it?"

But Detective McCabe could not say just then. In fact, ever since the preceding night when a kind of midsummer madness had come over him on Gloria's living-room couch, nothing had made very much sense to him. He had begun nuzzling her gently and tenderly around the fringes of an expensive new hairdo, and even after three years had got his face smacked.

"Say, you just listen here," Gloria had told him angrily. "You better watch yourself. Look at what you've done to my new blouse, and my sixty-five dollar hairdo. I like the nerve. Are you crazy or something?"

Detective McCabe, at that moment, had to grin crookedly. Yup, he told himself, after three years of going steady.

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"Now don't play any of your games with the old man," Malachi ordered him. "Get hold of yourself now, brace up. Put that young hussy out of your thoughts and keep her out. You brought your law books along, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes," Detective McCabe admitted grimly. "You know I did. I suppose you were even counting on it, with a dumbhead like me."

"Ah, not at all, not at all," Malachi soothed him, "and remember this, laddie. You have the old man depending on you. So don't let him down, remember. You wouldn't, would you?"

Obviously not, Detective McCabe decided reluctantly. Unthinkable! He couldn't let Gloria Fanning down either, because three years ago, when plighting his troth, certain promises had been made by him. First, he would secure his law degree. Second, he would save up the sum of $10,000 in hard cash, for a down payment on a new house he would buy her out on the island. And then, but only then, the possibility of marriage. And meanwhile, not even the thought of any—well, silliness between them.

She knew how to control herself, and he'd better learn, instead of complaining about a little honest affection from her. He would have to admit that she never went on in that whining and immature way, so why should he? But Detective McCabe hadn't known the answer to that either—not unless he wanted something from Gloria Fanning that she didn't want from him, and had never even considered, apparently.

Those were the thoughts that kept nagging at him all that evening in Cabin 7 at Mountainview Crest, despite another of his long, doggedly intense sessions with Wiegmore on Torts, and Prosser on Evidence. But in the end the only conclusion he came to was that Gloria Fanning didn't mind much waiting for him until the year 2596, if conditions required it. But what did that mean? That the true spark wasn't there for him, and never had been? Suddenly he got up, slung Prosser across the room, hit it with Wiegmore, and then opened the front door.

Light splashed a foreshortened yellow triangle on the paved driveway, and a full moon gazed down placidly from the heavens. He made one step out from his tiny porch, inhaling deeply.

"Mr. McCabe," he heard someone entreating him the next instant, and in what seemed like blind panic. "Oh, please! Mr. McCabe."

He turned his head quickly and saw a big convertible, lights off, parked in front of the business office, with Peggy Palmer and a young man standing beside it and apparently wrestling. Everybody

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but him, Detective McCabe thought suddenly and passionately; everybody in the whole world. His fists clenched.

"Now you people break that up," he commanded, that order coming out of him with his still remembered curtness, authority, and decision. "What's going on here, anyway? What's the problem?"

The girl tore herself free and ran toward him, the owner of the convertible following. Detective McCabe moved straight for him, crazy elation flooding over him. Now, at long last, he felt that someone was going to pay for what he'd had to accept and endure for three long years with Policewoman Fanning; that perhaps now, if the Gods had any justice at all, someone might just be stupid enough to walk right up to Franklin in his present mood, threaten physical force, and practically ask for it.

And someone did. The other man rushed head-on at him, swung viciously with his right arm, and swung again. But Detective McCabe, who had mastered many arts in his precise and methodical manner, stepped into him with a left hook, bent him in half with a short vicious right cross, then heaved him, heels over teakettle back up the steering wheel. It took no more than the proper physical fitness, the right emotional attitude, and some three and a half seconds.

"Oh, sweet mercy of heaven," the girl whispered. "Stop this, stop this at once, Mr. McCabe. Someone will hear us."

She was perfectly correct in making that statement. The lights came on over in Cabin 5, and a short middle-aged man in baggy yellow pajamas glared out at them. The man in the convertible, still trying to catch his breath, nodded savagely but just once at Detective McCabe—another time, buddy, this ain't finished between us yet—and spun the convertible so fast that gravel splattered.

Miss Peggy Palmer, meantime, backed off toward the business office, and Detective McCabe noticed, for the first time, that she wore nothing at all but white slippers, Chinese pajamas, and a night robe. The robe was torn.

"But what happened?" she demanded, holding her robe together, and looking in a bewildered way after the convertible. "Why, that was Bud Grant, Mr. McCabe. He's always getting into fights with people. But he's always winning them. He's one of those small-town toughs who just—oh, Mr. McCabe, you were just wonderful. Did he hurt you?"

But Detective McCabe was hurriedly locating and donning the hornrimmed eyeglasses. He was appalled at himself, and even more

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appalled at what Malachi would have had to say about a dead give-away of this nature.

"Why, I don't think so," he said. "It all happened too fast. You know that fellow?"

She adjusted the robe and her brown hair. It was all tousled.

"I've laughed at that man," she declared angrily. "I've insulted him. I've ordered him never even to talk to me on the street. Oh, I know what you think, Mr. McCabe, what you'd have to think at this hour. He rang the night bell five minutes ago, and I threw my robe on naturally and came out, thinking it was a late customer, and it was that man pestering me again, the way he does time after time. That's how it was, and that's all it was, Mr. McCabe."

"No need to explain," Detective McCabe said. "No need at all, Miss Palmer."

"And you still don't believe me," she said, throwing out one arm in a helplessly distracted gesture. "Oh, what can I do? I'm at the end of my rope, Mr. McCabe. Mama not here and my older sister Loretta in all that trouble back East, and that darned kid fighting with me every day in the week. Then that creature to come out here tonight, and give you the idea—"

She broke down. She started to make a blind headlong rush back to the business office, but tripped over a crack in the walk, and there was nothing for Franklin to do but pick her up. Then the brown hair brushed his lips; he felt the warmth of her slim golden arms under his fingers; and he sensed just one instant of accidental but almost overpowering closeness between himself and the Chinese pajamas. It was a closeness he had never been permitted to feel, or even to dream about, with Gloria Fanning. It seemed the promise, under the pale wisp of Utah moon high in the heavens, of a fabulous and enchanting secret in this girl, a secret preserved until this moment for no one but McCabe. The breeze whispered about it; the desert murmured even more softly back in the shadows; and he got the absurd notion that any second now the whole sky full of dim, heavy-looking Utah stars, was going to explode crazily away from him, to all quarters.

"Sometimes you don't even know why you're alive," she faltered, her breath touching him. "Oh, what's the point of it all, Mr. McCabe? What's the sense?"

But that was it, Detective McCabe thought. What was? If all you meant to a girl was $10,000 in cash, and a law degree, and if she

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could turn on you like an outraged and indignant Amazon because you dared touch that sixty-five dollar hairdo—

"But you were just splendid," she said, pausing for one last moment in the office doorway. "Just splendid, Mr. McCabe. You handled him like a small boy. I couldn't believe my own eyes. Are you sure he didn't hurt you at all? Let me look."

She drew away, scrutinizing him anxiously—his hair, the line of his jaw, his blue eyes. She stopped on them, perhaps feeling what Detective McCabe felt. For that sudden and miraculous moment her lips widened. They kept looking at each other. That lasted for only about three and a half seconds, also. And yet, even in that brief interim, something having to do with Gloria Fanning ended once and for all in Detective McCabe, and something else began.

"Miss Palmer," he babbled, finally recovering himself. "Don't go in yet, Miss Palmer, please don't. I want to talk to you about something important. Listen."

She flushed, wrapping the robe even more tightly around herself.

"No," she said. "Not—"

"Well, I never," the man in Cabin 5 said. He slammed his door, and a moment after, Miss Palmer, still blushing, slammed hers.

"But I've told you," Detective McCabe declared, and declared angrily—in the same phone booth as the night before, in the same drugstore, and to the same Malachi Hanrahan talking to him. "Everybody respects them out here. They go to service every Sunday morning. They cook for all the church suppers. They're as upright and decent a family—"

"Now is that so?" Inspector Hanrahan demanded even more sharply. "Then how does it happen that we've got hold of a new witness back here, and he's almost ready to identify the Knowlton woman as the one he saw riding with him on the night train out of Southampton the night of the murder? Church suppers, is it? Well, I'll church-supper you. Keep on defending those people the way you are, and I'll have you back pounding a beat the minute you get off the plane back here at LaGuardia. So pay attention to that now, and get me the information I need. Just do as you're told!"

And after that there wasn't any possible help for it. But all the way down the line Peggy Palmer and family checked out one hundred percent, and later on in the day, when he got back to Mountainview Crest, the kid Mary Alice hovered excitedly around him, wanting to hear the whole story about Bud Grant last night, and

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running to fetch Franklin Delano a cold drink, a package of cigarettes, and the evening paper.

"Peggy likes you a lot, Mr. McCabe, and so do I. Are you married?"

Then Peggy herself appeared, and they sat out on the bench in front waiting for customers. And that evening there was a cookout supper of frankfurters and baked beans—homemade baked beans, the best Franklin Delano ever remembered. Mary Alice was sent back to look after the office at eight o'clock. There was a yellow dress that time, with a yoked collar and white cuffs, and never could Franklin Delano remember anything half so fetching as a jade bracelet on a slim wrist, or as brown eyes meeting his every now and again with a shy, oddly helpless expression in them. It made his heart ache. But also, finally, it made him open the conversation with all the cunning duplicity of one of Malachi Hanrahan's brightest and most promising young men.

"Knew a fellow," he announced, while Miss Palmer poured another cup of coffee for him and passed the sugar. "Fellow that goes to night law school, old buddy of mine. Wants to get married, though, only this girl he has wouldn't even think of it. What she claims is that if they got married now it would only give him a lot of family responsibilities; set him back. Some girl, eh? What would you think?"

"Well," Miss Palmer said, now occupied with piling dishes together, and scraping them off, "I suppose the only question is whether she's the right girl for him, really. Do you think she is?"

"Not in my personal opinion," Detective McCabe said: "Nope, not any more. Only you know how long they've been going around together? Three years now."

"And now he's afraid to break it off with her," Miss Palmer said, scraping the last plate. "Then I'd say they're welcome to what they get, the two of them. Why, any normal girl ought to be able to tell the first minute, actually. She'd just know."

"Would she?" Detective McCabe said. "Right away, you mean? Like the very first time, maybe?"

"Oh, I think so," Miss Palmer said. "With of course the right man, that is."

Dusk shaded the valley below them. They could see the lights to Mountainview Crest and way beyond, on the other side of the valley, the toy cars of a transcontinental express whizzing past for Los Angeles. Every day Detective McCabe had watched it whiz by, and had even noted, with his methodical schoolmaster's habit, that it required exactly thirty-five minutes, even at sixty miles an hour,

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to pass from one end of the valley to the other. But what was he watching the lights of that train for? Here was the perfect opening for him, and she had offered it.

So—

"Miss Palmer," Detective McCabe said, bracing himself. "Listen. I'd like to ask you something. I mean something about the other night. Remember how you looked at me then, and how I looked at you? It was like—like I never saw a girl before in my whole life. And if you felt anything at all like that, I want to know. I think it would be kind of important to me."

"Oh, of course," Miss Palmer said, and laughed softly. "And knew then and there—" She turned her head from him, winking her eyes desperately. "Now you stop this," she said. "Stop it, Mr. McCabe, stop it, stop it, stop it! You've got the idea that I'm pretty cheap and easy, haven't you? That I invited Bud Grant out here the other night, and that if you rush me right off my feet now, and play your cards real smoothly, and carefully—"

"Maybe you didn't have to invite him," another voice broke in from the shadows just behind Detective McCabe, a low hating voice, whisper-soft. "He's here, though, and he's here to take care of Little Miss High Hat personally. No, don't turn, fellow. Just stay right where you are, and watch those hands!"

But Detective McCabe turned, anyway. He saw Bud Grant framed dimly on the other side of the small charcoal grill, all set there. And then he saw Bud Grant fire twice at him through the heavy beach towel wrapped around his right arm. There was not very much noise, but still Detective McCabe staggered sideways, thrust out both hands, and pitched headlong into a panful of dully glowing red embers. He lay motionless there, breathing in low, rapid gasps. His eyes had become fixed, rigid-looking, and wide-open. So had his mouth.

"And you," Bud Grant said, moving around the fire to her. "I'm just a small-town tough, ain't I? I'm not in your class, or your bigshot brother-in-law. I was good enough to drive him down to New York. But when we got there it was another story. Get lost, boy. You're small-town, Bud. Don't bother people, he said. I guess I showed him just how small-time I was, and now I'm going to show you, too. Come here to me! You hear what I'm saying?"

It was pretty difficult, with the right side of your chest caved in, and with the remains of a charcoal fire under you, to wait for the right moment of furious inattention, to get out your service revolver

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with your left hand, and with no noise, and to bring down Mr. Bud Grant with just one clear and agonizing shot through the left kneecap. Detective McCabe managed it, however. It was necessary. Miss Palmer was depending on him. Then he hobbled to his knees, smashed the other man under the left ear with his service revolver, and then collapsed forward, not caring about anything else at that moment, into blackness, emptiness, and serene peace . . .

"Well, here's the way I figure the thing," Detective McCabe explained afterward, and again over long distance, from the emergency room of the Cottonwood Grove General Hospital. "This Bud character, just because he drove Knowlton down to Las Vegas a couple of times this summer, and had a pretty high old time with him there, figured they were old drinking buddies. So he drove East with a pal of his, Ted Nolan, and bragged all the way what great friends he and Knowlton were, and how Knowlton would offer him the best in the house. But when they got there, it was not that way at all. Knowlton just brushed him off, or tried to, like a bit of dirt from the street. So Grant socked him, knocked him down that flight of stairs, and cracked his skull open.

"But he was lucky in that part—for the time being, anyway. Knowlton had got into a drunken rage that day and had fired all the servants. So there was no one to tell the police about who had paid a house call the night before. Out here tonight Grant had this fellow Nolan waiting in the car for him, and he admitted the whole thing.

"Then the other night Grant went over to the motel and got fresh with Miss Palmer. Only I walked in on it, and we had a fight, and because I got the better of it he decided to get even with me. I guess he figured to get rid of us by burying us in the woods out here. Oh, he had the whole thing figured all right, and maybe I would have too, if only you let me talk to Miss Palmer about it like I wanted to. But no, I had to work behind her back. I had to get myself nearly killed out here because you—"

"Now, now," Malachi Hanrahan said, not fazed in any way. "Who was it who insisted to you all along that the answer to the whole business had to be right out there in the state of Utah? Just think it over, laddie. You seem to be a little excited, and so is Policewoman Fanning, for that matter. They had to put her on a couch in Charley Molloy's office, because when the first news came in about you, somebody ran out of here shouting that you'd had the whole top of your head blown off. She went off into the whooping hysterics, and

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she's still yipping and yowling your name like a lost soul. Now will you talk to the woman, or give me a message?"

Detective McCabe was no longer alone however, he had someone with him. She was adjusting his brand-new white sling gently. He spoke to her, without bothering to put his hand over the mouthpiece.

"I'm still asking you that same question I tried to ask you before," Detective McCabe said, with his heart thumping, and yet tolerably sure that he ought to be just about to home plate by this time, what with the older sister all cleared now, and with Franklin Delano himself the indomitable conquering hero. "Because I want to know the answer to it, and I'm not fooling. What happened the other night outside your office, after I hit that fellow, and you looked at me, and I looked at you? Did you feel something that—well, kind of turned over in you, and turned you all funny? Tell me the truth, Miss Palmer, I got to know. Did you?"

She looked down. She looked up helplessly. She looked away. Then she nodded at him in a rosy and shamefaced manner, tightened her fingers in his, and straightened his collar.

"What?" Malachi Hanrahan said. "You've got to speak up, Franklin, I don't hear you."

"That's all right," Detective McCabe said. "I wasn't talking to you, and there's no message. Just look out for that sixty-five-dollar hairdo, will you? That's really important."

"The what?" Malachi said, sputtering a moment. "Oh, now hold on there, the woman is your responsibility, laddie. What do you expect me or Charley Molloy to do about her?"

"No, she isn't," Detective McCabe said. "Not now. I tried a little shopping around out here, and I think I've done better. So—" An extraordinary elation and buoyancy came over him as his hand tightened. "So I guess there's only one possible suggestion for you. Do nothing about Miss Fanning. Do nothing at all, Inspector. You just let her yip."

"Q"

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a *NEW* suspense story by

HENRY SLESAR

"Still no word from Peking . . . no radio contact with our embassy . . . six to ten missiles now on course . . . a fireball so bright it looked as if the sun had fallen to earth . . ."

Inside, the crisis was by comparison a small tragedy. Outside, the crisis was the great Armageddon, the ultimate, irreversible catastrophe . . .

THE BOTTOM LINE

by HENRY SLESAR

A choice of Armageddons, Sloan thought, forgetting this one time to jot down the words in his Felicitous Phrase Book. As Vice President in charge of network news, he was called upon for frequent speechmaking, and ever since Minow had made his mark with "vast wasteland," Sloan had been on the lookout for his own passwords to posterity. But tonight, sunk in the leather womb of an oversized armchair, his eyeglasses gleaming with the reflection of the nine-eyed monitors on the north wall of his study, Sloan wasn't sure there would *be* any more speeches. Or any posterity, for that matter.

On the CBS Monitor, Rather was rolling old stock of the Orion's launching on the Hood Canal; only a month later the shrill message had come out of Peking reporting the capture of the SSBN 719 following the accidental firing of the Polaris A-3 missile from its hellish bowels, causing widespread destruction of the northern tip of the Shantung Uplands. Sloan punched a button. On Monitor Two the network had returned to regular programming. Sloan's own network had Hays Hawthorne in front of the camera, with her steel-blue eyes and flower-petal lips. Sloan added audio from the chairside

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controls, and groaned when she said, ". . . recalling the Iranian crisis." How many times did *that* make, seventy-five?

He debated whether he should get on the phone, but decided to do nothing. He had told everyone that he was exhausted; that he shouldn't be expected until morning; and besides, he had Armageddon Two to face that night, and it required his full concentration. Petra's lover boy would be there any minute, and where the hell was his wife? Pouting prettily into a magnifying mirror, no doubt, while he sat there with nine lenses tuned in to world's end.

The carpet crackled under the sweep of the long gown she was wearing. Dressed to kill. Well, why not? It was her night.

"What's happening?" Petra said, her eyes skimming the electronic wall. "I've been afraid to turn on the radio. My hand was shaking so much I couldn't use any eyeliner."

"Still another crisis." Sloan smiled thinly. His fingers paddled all the buttons, making images dance across the screen until Petra cried out in protest. He blanked them all with the master switch and said, "Still no word from Peking. Nothing from the Chinese, no radio contact with our embassy. There's a rumor it was torched. As for the sailors, the death sentence still stands. All one hundred and ten men, starting with the officers."

"Oh, my God," Petra said. "Why don't they *do* something?"

"They're doing things. There was a report of a battle on the Sviersk border—"

"Maybe that's all it will come to," Petra said. "Maybe the Chinese and the Russians will make it their fight."

"We're either allies or enemies, my sweet." The doorbell was chiming, and their eyes locked. World crisis became a secondary topic in both minds. Warren was at the door. For the first time since Sloan had casually introduced him to Petra in his own office, the three of them would be together in one room. Of course, they had been together in pairs since that day—Sloan-Warren in network offices, Petra-Warren in hotel bedrooms. At least, Sloan was so convinced, despite Petra's denials. In his rulebook a woman wouldn't decide to leave her husband for a man she hadn't bedded. The image of their coupling shook him more than any picture he had seen on the nine monitors.

Dolores showed Warren into the library, and for an absurd moment the two men shook hands. So much for Civilization, even near its end. There was, however, no need for small talk. Warren's thin

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face, boyish even with its trendy mustache, was drawn with anxiety as he asked what the "latest" was.

"I'll tell you how it looks," Sloan said cheerfully. "This whole discussion tonight may not mean a damn thing in a few hours. It won't be a question about who lives with who, but who lives, period." He would have added a chuckle if Petra hadn't made a noise of disgust.

"God Almighty," Warren said prayerfully.

"Petra thinks maybe we should put off this discussion. I don't agree. Obviously, you both want this thing settled, even if the big bomb's going to drop."

"You're the one who suggested this meeting," Warren said.

"You may be lucky I did." Sloan grinned. "How many people do you know in Westchester who have a bomb shelter? Guy we bought the house from—my God, Pet, was it eight years ago?—he installed it, right out there in the back yard. Completely underground, with solid concrete blocks, got its own generator." He winked at his wife. "Pet and me used to use it once in a while. Instant honeymoons, you know?"

Warren knew he was being baited. He said, "Let's get this over with, okay? First of all, I assume that if Petra leaves you, I leave the network?"

"Might be the best thing that happened to you out of this, Warren. What are you making now, thirty-five? That's no kind of money for a grown man. I wonder if Petra realizes how little money that is?"

"Don't be gross," she said.

"Take off taxes and stuff, and what have you got left? A few hundred a week? Petra spends that much on her nails."

"Petra knows all about my finances."

"No," Sloan said sadly. "Pet doesn't know the first thing about money, she never has. She hasn't looked at a checkbook balance for the last ten years. Ever carry her purse for her? Wonder why it's so heavy? Credit cards." He did chuckle this time, and Warren looked accusingly at Petra.

"See? I told you he didn't want to talk—practicalities."

"Hey, Warren, come on," Sloan said. "What's more practical than money? Pet likes to entertain and eat well—we run up restaurant bills of a thousand a month. Her clothes cost more than you earn in a year. And this house—"

"So that's your argument, huh? Food, clothing, and shelter."

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"Which reminds me," Sloan said, looking at his watch. "Denton ought to be on the air now."

"Who?" Petra said.

"Denton Barnes, our newest hotshot." Sloan tapped the button that illuminated the center screen on his viewing wall, but it seemed to produce the simultaneous sound of the doorbell. He frowned and darkened the screen again. "Who the hell is *that?*" he said. He knew the answer even before Dolores announced Chip Lowery; there was no mistaking the jowly vowels of his speech, familiar to Sloan through daily commuter gin games. Lowery was his next-door neighbor, the head of a brokerage house. He was saying something in bluff hearty tones to Dolores, and there was another voice as well, Tina, his wife, her Betty Boop topnotes higher than usual.

"I wasn't expecting them," Petra said nervously. "You didn't ask them over, did you? No, of course you didn't."

Lowery's grin showed more back teeth than usual.

"Hey, Sloan," he said. "Hope you don't mind. Me and Tina thought, if anybody knows what's going on in this cockeyed world it'll be you. Hell, I said, you'd probably be down in the old newsroom, on the hotline to the White House or something, but Tina saw the lights on and she said . . ."

He was trailing off, looking at Warren. His wife giggled. She was moonfaced, and the resemblance was heightened by her dead-white pallor. They were both emanating fear like body odor. A dog would have growled at them. Sloan didn't keep a dog, so he growled instead.

"I don't know any more than you do. Oh, this is Warren Crisp. Warren, Mr. and Mrs. Lowery, my neighbors. *Our* neighbors," he corrected, looking at Petra. She picked up her drink and asked him to turn on the news. Sloan seemed hesitant, but he looked at his watch and that seemed to decide him. The screen lit up.

Denton Barnes was a handsome gnome with pointed ears. He was the newest and youngest of the network's newscasters, but now he looked older.

"This just in," he said, rattling a sheet of paper. "A correspondent from the Dutch news agency reports that Russian MIGs have bombed and sunk the U.S. carrier Terrapin in the Sea of Japan, but there is no information on who piloted the planes . . ."

"But why, *why?*" Tina keened. "Why are the Russians mad at us? It was the Chinese we bombed! Don't they *hate* the Chinese?"

"Maybe they weren't Russian planes," Lowery said, in a strangled voice.

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"Maybe it's a preemptive strike," Warren said. "The Russians might figure we'll get into a scrap with China, and include them."

"We may get it from any direction," Sloan grunted.

"Listen, listen!" Petra said, but there wasn't much to listen to; Denton Barnes seemed to be on the telephone. By the time he hung up, Tina was beginning to whimper.

Barnes said, "We've just received word that there'll be an announcement from the White House shortly. Meanwhile, local civil-defense authorities are being instructed to prepare for a full or partial alert, that hasn't been made clear yet. However, it might be suggested that some precautions be taken—"

"Precautions?" Tina squealed. "What does that mean? What do they want us to do?"

"Well, I suppose there's *one* thing we could do," Lowery said, looking at Sloan.

"The bomb shelter," Petra breathed. "We could watch the news *there*, couldn't we? Just to be on the safe side?" Warren frowned into his drink.

"Let's face it," Sloan said. "Things are moving fast. The Chinese will start shooting those officers, the Russians are sinking our ships expecting we're going to dump on them—somebody's going to panic and start pressing buttons—"

"I'm not arguing," Warren said, putting down his glass. "Have you got any Scotch in that place?"

"A two-week supply of everything." Sloan smiled.

He turned up the audio, and Denton Barnes said, ". . . unconfirmed report that the President has ordered a full-scale mobilization of all armed forces . . ."

"Please," Petra said pleadingly. Sloan pushed himself out of the armchair with an athletic bound. He had never felt younger, even in the presence of Warren who was ten years his junior.

"All right, Petra, you take these people to the shelter. I've got to send Dolores home and make sure the house is shut up tight—we don't want any friendly looting while we're underground. Warren, you might as well grab some booze anyway—it's better than anything I keep below. Petra, you'd better change—that outfit doesn't look too comfortable for a bomb shelter. Wear something sensible, like Mrs. Lowery." He smiled meaningfully at the slacks his neighbor was wearing.

"No," she said, shaking her head. "I don't care about what I'm wearing. Let's just go!"

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They went off in different directions. Sloan wasn't even sure that Petra would find the grassed-over door of the place. There had actually been only one "honeymoon" there, and she had agreed reluctantly to the tryst, considering it a grisly aberration. But ten minutes later, when Sloan loped across the darkening lawn, the lead-lined door was open and waiting for him.

He descended the short ladder, and found Petra squeezed into a corner of one of the bunks, Warren leaning over her and arguing in low tones. The Lowerys were in front of the wall-mounted television set, trying to find the controls. Sharply Warren told them to get away from the damned thing before they ruined it. "If you want something to do," he said, "read this." He tossed the broker a pamphlet from one of the shelves.

Lowery thumbed through the pages of what was apparently a Civil Defense manual. "Radiation," he said, and pushed it into his wife's hands as if the paper itself was contaminated. Then he looked around the shelter, at the plywood shelves stocked with gray cans, their contents stenciled in black letters. There were tools, utensils, blankets, medical supplies, all neatly labeled as well. Sloan had even provided for radiation metering—a ratemeter, dosemeter, and charger were on the wall, next to a box of shotgun cartridges. Shotgun? Warren saw two of them, both double-barreled, hanging on a pegboard and said something about it.

Sloan replied, "It's not in the manual. But you know what happens when those bombs start dropping, and people realize you've got the only game in town?"

Lowery stirred uncomfortably at this, and his wife said, "Why don't we get some *news?*"

Sloan pushed a control button and produced a test pattern with a CD emblem; the piercing high-frequency sound that filled the shelter was like a scream of terror. Then Barnes appeared, facial hues washed away. Sloan fiddled with a dial, but it didn't help.

"This just in from the White House," Barnes said. "The President will make an emergency address to the nation at eight thirty. Meanwhile, here's a report from Jim Bruner at our Washington News Bureau." Denton looked expectantly into the camera, but nothing happened. His face went naked before the unblinking stare. "Looks like Jim isn't ready with his report, so we'll switch you back to our studio for Hays Hawthorne, taped earlier."

When her baby-blue eyes appeared on the screen, Lowery grumbled. "We've seen this damned thing before. Try CBS."

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"Wrong network." Sloan smiled with heavy humor. "And it's *my* set." He would have added, "My shelter," but he saw Petra's exasperated look at Warren, who had fixed his attention on the screen, now refilled by Barnes' blanched image.

"We now have an unconfirmed report, repeat, *unconfirmed*, from the Detection and Tracking Center in Colorado—" A burst of alarmed exclamations obscured the next few words. ". . . main computer, six to ten missiles, perhaps more, tracked from a northern latitude, now on course for the Eastern seaboard, but there is no word on the nature . . ."

Tina was shrieking and tugging at her husband as if he was somehow responsible. Warren shouted for quiet while Lowery struggled with his wife's hysteria and Petra slumped into a corner with her back pressed against the cement-block wall, unconcerned by the chill. Then Denton Barnes was gone and the CD signal was back, shrilling in competition with Tina Lowery.

The muffled sound that followed silenced her, silenced them all; it hadn't been loud; maybe it was no more than a glitch from the speaker, an electrostatic hum of limited duration. Lowery chanced another explanation. "They did it," he said almost reverently. "They dropped the big one."

"Look," Warren said.

Barnes was back on the tube. It was momentarily reassuring, until he said, "The White House has announced that nuclear devices have been detonated over at least four cities in Canada and the United States. No further details are available, but we have a recorded telephone report from correspondent Brett Johns in Buffalo, New York. Please stand by."

A card appeared on the screen, a murky photograph of a face none of them knew, some anonymous stringer thrust into the network spotlight by his proximity to disaster.

". . . a fireball so bright it looked as if the sun had fallen to earth, temporarily blinded everyone who saw it, including myself, despite the fact that it must have detonated at least a thousand miles away, somewhere in the vicinity of Quebec. Within twenty minutes another fireball, even brighter than the first, was seen to the south, possibly between Cleveland and Pittsburgh . . . Now there's . . ."

The recording ended, and Denton Barnes was back. "Here is a bulletin from the Civil Defense Authority. While no word has yet been received on nuclear missiles in this locality, the following steps should be taken immediately. If you are near a private or public

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shelter, proceed there at once. Do not, repeat, do *not* take time to collect any belongings or attempt to reach members of your family, with the possible exception of small children. If you are unable to reach a public or private shelter, proceed to the basement of the nearest building. If you are in a large public building with no access to the basement, proceed to the middle floors. Stay as far away from outside walls and windows as you can—"

"Thank God we're *here*," Lowery said. "I knew it was going to happen, Sloan, crazy, trigger-happy—"

"If you are in your own home," Barnes read, "remember that the primary danger will be fire. Remove all quick-burning materials. Shut off main electric and gas lines. Close venetian blinds. Fill bathtubs, sinks, buckets, and other containers with water . . . And remember, if there is a nuclear blast in your vicinity, it will not be safe to venture out of your shelter area until you are advised about fallout conditions." Barnes looked at someone off-camera, and then picked up one of the phones beside him. He spoke inaudibly for a moment, and listened longer. Then he hung up and said, "We'll be leaving the air at this time, but we expect to resume broadcasting within the hour. Meanwhile, keep tuned to your local civil-defense radio station for further bulletins."

The moment the screen darkened, Lowery dived for the portable radio on the shelf. He switched it on and produced silence. "It's dead! The damned thing is dead!"

"How long have those batteries been there?" Warren asked dryly. "A year, two?"

"Big communications expert!" Tina Lowery said bitterly. "Is that how much you know, Sloan?"

"Shut up," Sloan said. "We'll just have to count on *that*," indicating the TV set. Warren was already at the controls, forgetting Sloan's earlier dictum. Every channel was blank.

"What does it mean?" Petra said. "Have they dropped it? Here?"

"We would have heard the blast," Warren said. "We would have heard *something*."

"Maybe we did," Lowery said, turning his head when the CD signal sounded, along with the voice of Denton Barnes.

"Here is the first report on the effect of the nuclear device which exploded over Syracuse thirty minutes ago. The entire city has been engulfed in flames. The blast pressure following the heat wave has leveled every structure within a five-mile radius. Casualties are estimated in the tens of thousands. Witnesses have reported that

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the mushroom cloud which first appeared over the city has now spread out within a thirty- to forty-mile radius . . ."

"That's it," Petra said. "That's the end."

"Hell it is," Sloan answered gruffly. "We're here, we're safe, what more can we expect?"

"There'll be more bombs," Tina Lowery whispered. "They'll keep bombing us until we're all dead!"

"The retaliatory strikes must have started by now," Warren said. "The anti-missile weapons. They're bound to have done *something*. Maybe the worst is over—".

"The worst may be yet to come," Sloan said. "Fallout."

"Radiation," Petra said, remembering the CD manual on the bunk beside her. Her fingers scrambled for it, the bright red tips fluttering through the pages. "Radiation symptoms," she said. "Nausea, lack of appetite, fatigue—my God, I have all of those now—fever, mouth soreness, diarrhea, gum and mouth ulcers, bleeding, hair fallout—" She laughed suddenly. "That's why they call it fallout, you see. You lose your hair." Then she was sobbing hysterically.

Warren went to her, but Sloan remained staring at the now silent television screen. After a while he grabbed a bottle of Scotch, pouring himself a plastic cupful without asking if anyone else wanted a drink. He waited until Petra's sobs had been stilled by Warren's sympathy, and then he sat down next to them.

"Well," he said. "We might be here a long time. Days, weeks. We'll have plenty of time to talk about things, won't we?"

"Are you insane?" Warren asked. "With the atom *bomb* out there you want to talk about the future?"

Sloan handed Petra his cup, and she took a greedy swallow.

"Why not?" Sloan said. "If it's the end of the world, damn it, I want to know *how* it ends. I hate unfinished stories, don't you, Petra? Remember when they killed that Ben Gazzara show, and you were upset because you never knew if he lived or died? Well, assuming we survive this thing, who goes where? You, me, you, him, all three of us, ménage à trois, what?" He laughed, and Lowery turned a furious face at this obscene sound. "I'm serious, Petra, let's talk *now*, let's settle this thing before anything else happens."

"Sloan, for God's sake," Warren said. "This 'thing' was settled weeks ago! Only the terms, the terms! We just want to know if you're going to let Petra go without a fight, without another war! God knows one is enough!"

"Don't, don't," Petra said weakly, wishing she could faint, sleep,

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die temporarily, wake up in a different place and time. But her husband was persisting.

"Say something, Petra," he told her. "How do you feel now? Things have to be a little different *now*, don't they?

"Not for us," Warren said. "We love each other. That's it. That's the bottom line. You think *that* changes it?" He was nodding at the TV set, as if it was the source of the conflict.

"Things change all the time," Sloan countered. "It's not the same world out there. You know what's out there now? Smoke and fire and dead things."

"There was no direct hit in this area," Warren said. "Don't make it worse than it is."

"You'd rather be out *there* than here?"

"So that's it. You expect gratitude, right? Because you invited me into this hole in the ground!"

Petra moaned and reached for the plastic cup again. Sloan let her finish the Scotch, and then told Warren: "You don't like it here, Warren, you can always leave. Hell, you can both leave, right now, hand in hand." The huddled figures of the Lowerys stirred at this. "Well?" Sloan said. "How about it? You said you wanted Petra to leave my house as soon as possible, why not now?"

"Don't be stupid," Warren said thickly. Sloan's smile spread like a cracked sidewalk. Warren couldn't look at it any more, so he turned and picked up the Scotch bottle.

"Sure, go ahead, drink my whiskey, use my shelter, take my wife." Sloan began shaking his head. He shook the uneasy smile off his face. "No, come to think of it, a guy can only be so generous."

The younger man slammed the bottle down, but Sloan wasn't through.

"You can have the Scotch, that's okay. You can have Petra, too. I told you I wasn't going to make any fuss. There's still freedom of choice in this country, right? Long as it lasts. There, you see? You came over here to settle the issue, and now it's settled. Take her, Warren, she's all yours. There's the door. Good luck."

"The word for your sense of humor," Warren said, "is warped."

"It's not a joke. I said you can have my wife. You just can't have my shelter. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

The Lowerys were watching them, but now a film of detachment had glazed their eyes; it was a confrontation they didn't care to join. Warren was searching the nuances of Sloan's expression. What he saw finally alarmed him.

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"You can't throw me out, Sloan. Not even you would do that."

Sloan took three small steps to the wall and lifted one of the shotguns from the pegs. As casual as he tried to make the motion, there was still the tangy flavor of melodrama in the air. Sloan wouldn't have surprised them if he had cocked the weapon with one hand, like a Western hero in one of the series of a past season.

"You can go," Sloan said, and turned to Petra. "You can leave, too, Petra. It's okay. You have my blessings."

Petra said, "Go? Out there? Are you crazy? I'm not going out *there!*"

"You said you didn't want anything of mine," Sloan shrugged. "You said you didn't give a damn about 'security.' Well, okay. This is my security. Now you can prove you meant what you said. Go ahead."

Warren said, "You can put me out, Sloan, that's your privilege. But Petra's still your wife."

"Be reasonable," Lowery said meekly, despite his wife's warning grip. "This is no time to settle domestic quarrels—"

The shotgun swiveled just slightly, tightening the Lowerys' huddle. "You weren't even invited, Chip," Sloan said dreamily. "You're a guest, too. Remember the house rules."

"I'm not going!" Petra was on her feet. "You're not putting Warren out, either! You can't be that vicious, Sloan, you can't be that vindictive—" She went to Warren's side, seizing his arm protectively. It was a tactical error.

"You remember how you came in, don't you, Warren?" Sloan said tightly. "That's the way you're leaving. I guess Petra's decided to go with you. Good luck out there. You might try getting back to the house, but I don't think it's the safest place. We don't even have a basement. When the blast comes, the damned house will probably fall in around your ears. No, your best bet is the main highway. There'll be cars, probably, people thinking they can escape to the hills—"

"You mean this?" Warren said. "You really do?"

"Just be careful. They'll be crazy out there by now. Better go quick before things get worse than they are."

Warren looked at Petra. She released his arm and took a backward step. It made Sloan smile.

"You can send for your things later, whatever's left. It may be your only chance, Petra. If Warren leaves now and heads into those hills, you may never catch up with him again."

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"He may be right," Warren said tonelessly. "It's better if we leave together. We'll find another shelter." He reached for her elbow, but she pulled away. "Petra," he said with an ache in his voice.

"Warren-for-the-love-of-God!" There was Tina's shrillness in Petra's voice. "How can you ask me to do that? To go out *there?* We'd *die.* Fast—or slow—the heat—fire—fallout! No, I can't, I can't!"

She was shrinking back, walking in a sideways motion that put her up against Sloan's rock-still body, leaning into it. Warren saw the move and interpreted it correctly; so did Sloan and even the Lowerys, all of them aware that a choice had been made.

Warren looked away from her. His eyes sought the seams of the shelter door. He found them, put his hand on the leaden surface, but then turned to Sloan again.

"Let me take something. Water. Some food. God knows what's out there."

Sloan gave him a magnanimous smile. He went to the shelves and plucked a gallon can marked Water and a smaller can marked Biscuits. Warren accepted them without thanks, and said, "One other thing. There may be rioting, looting. I won't be able to hold onto *these* too long if I can't defend myself."

"Oh, no," Sloan said. "You can't have the gun, Warren. I've seen that stupid trick on television too often."

"You've got two shotguns. Take the shells out of one of them if you don't trust me. Just give me something to take care of myself with! Please!"

"Please," Petra echoed faintly.

Sloan shrugged and took the other shotgun from the pegboard. He broke it open, removed the shells, and let them bounce on the taut blanket of the bunk.

"If you think an unloaded gun will help you, here." He tossed it to the encumbered Warren who caught it clumsily.

Warren's eyes searched for Petra's face again. She turned it away. Warren nodded slightly and pushed against the heavy door with hand and shoulder until it swung open. The Lowerys cringed in their corner as if expecting the next bomb to drop through the opening. When it closed behind Warren, they looked at Petra and her husband. They were motionless, his arm around her. They were like domestic statuary.

The quiet struck Warren like a wet dropcloth. The country sound of crickets and leaf murmurs came as a relief. The air smelled like

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dew-soaked grass. What had he expected? Gunpowder, ash, burning flesh? The smell was all wrong.

He looked at the long rambling house fifty yards ahead of him, its edges sharp against the pewter sky. There was only one light, but it meant that electricity was still flowing. All right. The shelter had been electrified, too, and Sloan hadn't resorted to the auxiliary generator. So far so good.

He heard the sound of a human voice, and felt even more comforted. There was life after detonation. He scanned the clouds for flecks of oncoming death, and saw nothing. Why did the air smell so sweet?

As he came nearer the house, he realized that the light and the voice were emanating from the same source. It was a lone television set in a room next to Sloan's study. The voice was a woman's, and remarkably calm. Hays Hawthorne, taped earlier? But who was watching? Some forgotten servant; a looter, prowler, marauder? Or nobody at all?

Warren dropped the containers and tucked the shotgun firmly under his arm. He crept along the side of the house until he was underneath the window. Even before he lifted his head to peer inside, he heard the word "Chinese" repeated twice in the same sentence. It was Hays Hawthorne, all right, sounding downright cheerful. He looked into the room and she was gone. The screen was lit up with the candy colors of the CD signal card. Bright enough to illuminate more of the room, including the man in the leather chair, smoking, drinking beer.

Warren could only see the back of his head, but the ears were familiar. Pointy ears. What the hell was Denton Barnes doing *here*? Smoking, drinking beer out of a can, looking at a CD signal? Ten minutes ago he had been in a TV studio, pontificating right up to the edge of eternity. Now here he was. Denton Barnes, taped earlier? Warren stood up. He had a better view of the room now, including the TV camera, lens pointed at Denton Barnes's head, pointy ears and all.

Sloan had thoughtfully left the front door unlatched. Warren marched in like an army with banners, straight through the hallway and study. Then he was in the room, shouting at Barnes to get on his feet and start explaining, not that Warren needed explanation.

"Damn it, Warren, it was a joke, a *joke*," Barnes said, shaking all over, right to the tips of his ears. "Put that gun down, man!"

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"It was Sloan's joke, right? Hooking you right into that TV set in the shelter!"

"He told me you two were buddies," Barnes said, "that you were always pulling practical jokes. He said it was his turn, that you were teasing him about his *shelter*, and he figured this would be a great gag—"

Warren let the trigger snap and Denton Barnes ducked behind the leather chair.

"Hell, Warren, I swear it's the truth! It was only meant for yocks! He got the idea when the Chinese grabbed those guys in the sub, he figured it was just the right time to teach you a lesson—"

"It was a lesson, all right," Warren said grimly. "It was a demonstration, for his wife. A demonstration!"

"Hell, his wife must have *known*, Warren—"

"No," Warren said, feeling sick, nauseated, all the symptoms of mock radiation fever. "No, Petra didn't know. He wanted to prove something to her, prove that she needed his shelter, his damn shelter."

"She'll think different when she knows it's a joke," Barnes said helpfully. "Honest, Warren, that's all it was—"

"She'll never look me in the eye again," Warren said, and then looked Denton in the eye, murderously. The shotgun muzzle had been lowered for a moment, now it came up again.

"Look, it's all right, it's all right!" Barnes said. "I mean, the crisis is over. The Chinese have let the crewmen go, they made some kind of deal. I don't know what. The crisis is *over*, Warren, and so's the joke!"

"Is it?" Warren said.

Petra was crying and Sloan was relieved to see her tears. Tears were something he understood about women, one of the few things. He made a fortress out of his arms. He told her, *it's all right, everything's all right. Don't you see what happened here? You didn't go with him because you didn't want to go, because you couldn't take your chances with him, not in a crisis.* "You need me," Sloan told her, and she didn't argue with him. "You need me," he said, "and I need you."

When she tightened her arms around him, and let him kiss her on the lips, Sloan began to smile and even to laugh softly, and he said to her and the Lowerys, "And now listen because I have something to tell you."

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But there was Denton Barnes on the screen again, and Chip Lowery was on his feet telling Sloan to shut up so they could hear him. Good old Denton, Sloan thought. "Ladies and gentlemen," Sloan said liltingly, "you're looking at one of the best newscasters in the business—"

"Let's *hear* him!" Lowery shouted.

". . . the intense shower of radioactive particles following the detonation of the bomb over the city of Poughkeepsie—"

"Poughkeepsie!" Tina said. "That's practically next door!"

". . . widespread fallout of highly radioactive matter carried by winds of more than fifty miles per hour and complicated by steadily falling rain in the New York area—"

"Denton!" Sloan yelled, glaring at the screen. "Are you crazy? Are you out of your mind? What the hell are you saying?"

"We repeat," Denton Barnes said, clearly a man sick with the thought of death so close to his back, "Do not leave your homes or shelters until so advised by the civil-defense authority. *Do not leave your present place of shelter.* If you have been outdoors or exposed to what you believe may be fallout particles, clean yourself and your clothing thoroughly. Discard all items which may have been heavily contaminated, especially food and drinking water."

"It's not true!" Sloan said to them. "That isn't in the script, believe me. He wasn't supposed to say that!"

"Oh, God, now what?" Tina began to sob. "Sloan's talking crazy, Chip, we're locked up here with a madman—"

"If you show any symptoms of radiation sickness," Barnes was saying, "rest all you can, take aspirin, motion-sickness pills for nausea, drink plenty of liquids in case of—"

"Listen," Sloan said, holding up both hands in a conciliatory gesture, "it's all a joke, okay? And now it's over."

". . . if your symptoms are serious," Denton Barnes said, "contact the medical authorities if any are operating in your area."

"There's your *joke*," Lowery said bitterly. "Who's going to take care of anyone else?"

"We repeat," Barnes said. "Do not leave your shelter for any reason until you are advised. Keep doors and windows tightly shut. Do not permit deadly radiation to enter your shelter. This is Denton Barnes, and this station is now leaving the air."

"*No!*" Sloan bellowed. "That isn't right, you idiot!"

"There will be no more television transmission in this area. Stay

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tuned to your local civil-defense radio station for further instructions."

The screen went dark, and Sloan went crazy. He leaped for the dials and tried to restore the head of Denton Barnes, Petra tried to pull him away, weeping pathetically. Then Sloan began talking again, speaking slowly, carefully.

"Listen," he said, "I swear this to you. There isn't any bomb. There isn't any fallout. That was Denton Barnes, *my* Denton Barnes, get it? He works for me, he did this for *me*. It was all a gag, a put-on, a practical joke, don't you see?"

"Please sit down," Lowery said. "Have a drink, Sloan."

"This isn't an ordinary television set. It's closed circuit. Look, I can prove it to you, I can show you. Come on." He went to the shelter door and pushed against it. Lowery grabbed his left arm and pulled him away.

"Didn't you hear what he *said*, Sloan? Dangerous radiation! You can't let it into the shelter, for God's sake, you'll kill all of us! We're safe if we stay here—and wait—"

"We'll wait forever, you idiot! There isn't any radio, I made sure there *wasn't* any radio!"

"What's he saying?" Tina whimpered to Petra. "What's wrong with him, Petra?"

"He'll be all right," Petra said loyally.

"We're all right *now*," Sloan said, and went back to the door, pushing at it with all his strength. Tina shrieked mightily, and Chip Lowery did the only sensible thing in the circumstances. He picked up the shotgun and fired it at Sloan before the deadly air could infiltrate their place of safety, their sanctuary, their shelter.

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a *NEW* short story by

RUTH RENDELL

He was obsessed with the look of fear in women's eyes—he could sense and smell that fear. These days a woman takes her life in her hands—rather, puts her life in another's hands—when she walks alone in dark and lonely places . . .

THE MAN WHO FRIGHTENED WOMEN

by RUTH RENDELL

Frightening people used to be a hobby of mine. Perhaps I should rather say an obsession, and not people but, specifically, women. Making others afraid *is* enjoyable, as everyone discovers who has tried it and succeeded. I suppose it has something to do with power. Most people never really try it so they don't know, but look at the ones who do. Judges, policemen, prison guards, customs officers, tax inspectors. They have a great time, don't they? You don't find them giving up or adopting other methods. Frightening people goes to their heads, they're drunk on it, they live by it. So did I. While other men might go down to the pub with the boys or to football, I went off to Epping Forest and frightened women. It was what you might call my outside interest.

Don't get me wrong. There was nothing—well, nasty, about what I did. You know what I mean by that; I'm sure I don't have to go into details. I'm far from being some sort of pervert, I can tell you. In fact, I err rather on the side of too much moral strictness. Nor am I one of those lonely deprived men. I'm happily married and the father of a little boy, I'm six feet tall, not bad-looking, and I assure you, entirely physically and mentally normal.

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Of course I've tried to analyze myself and discover my motives. Was my hobby ever any more than an antidote to boredom? By anyone's standards the life I lead would be classed as pretty dull—selling tickets and answering passengers' queries at Anglo-Mercian Airways terminal, living in a semi in Muswell Hill, going to tea with my mother-in-law on Sundays, and having an annual fortnight in a holiday flat in South Devon. I got married very young. Adventure wasn't exactly a conspicuous feature of my existence. The biggest thing that happened to me was when we thought one of our charters had been hijacked in Greece, and that turned out to be a false alarm.

My wife is a nervous sort of girl. Mind you, she has cause to be, living where we do close to Highgate Wood and Queens Wood. A woman takes her life in her hands, walking alone in those places. Carol used to regale me with stories—well, she still does.

"At twenty past five in the afternoon! It was still broad daylight. He assaulted her and cut her in the face—she had to have seventeen stitches in her face and neck."

Carol doesn't drive and if she comes home from anywhere after dark I always go down to the bus stop to meet her. She won't even walk along the Muswell Hill Road because of the woods on both sides.

"If you see a man on his own in a place like that," she said, "you naturally ask yourself what he's doing there, don't you? A young man, just walking aimlessly about. It's not as if he had a dog with him. It makes your whole body go tense and you get a sort of awful crawling sensation all over you. If you didn't come and meet me I don't think I'd go out at all."

Was it that which gave me the idea? At any rate, it made me think about women and fear. Things are quite different for a man—he never thinks about being afraid to be in dark or lonely places. I'm sure I never have and therefore, until I got all this from Carol, I never considered how important this business of being scared when out alone might be to them. When I came to understand it gave me a funny feeling of excitement.

And then I actually frightened a woman myself—by chance.

My usual way of going to work is to cut through Queens Wood to Highgate tube station and take the Northern Line down into London. When the weather is very bad I go to the station by bus but most of the time I walk there and back and the way through the wood is a considerable short cut. I was coming back through the wood at

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about six one evening in March. It was dusk, growing dark. The lamps, each a good distance apart from each other, which light the paths, were lit, but I often think these give the place a rather more bleak and sinister appearance than if it were quite dark.

You leave a light behind you and walk along a dim shadowy avenue toward the next lamp which gleams faintly some hundred yards ahead. And no sooner is it reached, an acid-yellow glow among the bare branches, than you leave it behind again to negotiate the next dark stretch. I thought about how it must be for a woman walking through the wood and, yes, I gloried in my maleness and my freedom from fear.

Then I saw the girl coming. She was walking along the path from Priory Gardens. It came into my head that she would be less wary of me if I continued as I had been, marching briskly and purposefully toward Wood Vale, swinging along and looking like a man homeward bound to his family and his dinner. There was no definite intent present in my mind when I slackened my pace, then stopped and stood still. But as soon as I'd done that I knew I was going to carry it through.

The girl came up to where the paths converged and where the next lamp was. She gave me a quick darting look. I stood there in a very relaxed way and I returned her look with a blank stare. I suppose I consciously, out of some sort of devilment, made my eyes fixed and glazed and let my mouth go loose.

Anyway, she turned quickly away and began to walk much faster.

She had high heels so she couldn't go very fast, not as fast as I could, just strolling along behind her. I gained on her until I was only a yard behind.

I could smell her fear. She was wearing a lot of perfume and her sweat seemed to accentuate it so that there came to me a whiff and then a wave of heady, mixed-up animal and floral scent. I breathed it in, I breathed heavily. She began to run and I strode after her. What she did then was unexpected. She stopped, turned round, and cried out in a tremulous terrified voice:

"What do you want?"

I stopped too and gave her the same look. She held her handbag out to me.

"Take it!"

The joke had gone far enough. I lived round there, so I had my wife and son to think of. I put on a cockney voice.

"Keep your bag, love. You've got me wrong."

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And then, to reassure her, I turned back along the path and let her escape to Wood Vale and the lights and the start of the houses. But I can't describe what a feeling of power and—well, triumphant manhood and what's called machismo the encounter gave me. I felt grand. I swaggered into my house and Carol asked if I had had a winner in the Sweeps?

Since I'm being strictly truthful in this account, I'd better add the other consequence of what happened in the wood, even though it does rather go against the grain with me to mention things like that. I made love to Carol that night and it was a lot better than it had been for a long time—in fact, it was sensational for both of us. And I couldn't kid myself that was due to anything but my adventure with the girl.

Next day I looked at myself in the mirror with all the lights off but the little tubular one over our bed, and I put on the same look I'd given the girl when she turned in my direction under the lamp. I can tell you I nearly frightened myself. I've said I'm not bad-looking and that's true, but I'm naturally pale and since I'm thin, my face tends to be a bit gaunt. In the dim light my eyes seemed sunk in deep sockets and my mouth hung loose in a vacant mindless way.

I stepped back from the glass so that I could see the whole of myself, slouching, staring, my arms hanging. There was no doubt I had the potential of being a woman-frightener of no mean calibre.

They say it's the first step that counts. I had taken the first step but the second was bigger and it was weeks before I took it. I kept telling myself not to be a fool, to forget these mad ideas. Besides, surely I could see I'd soon be in trouble if I made a habit of frightening women in Queens Wood, on my own doorstep. But I couldn't stop thinking about it. I remembered how wonderful I'd felt that evening, how tall I'd walked and what a man I'd been.

The funny thing was what a lot of humiliating things seemed to happen to me at that time, between the Queens Wood incident and the next occasion. A woman at the air terminal actually spat at me. No, I'm not exaggerating. Of course she was drunk, smashed out of her mind on duty-free Scotch, but she spat at me and I had to stand there in the middle of the ticket hall with all those tourists milling about, and wipe the spittle off my uniform. Then I got a reprimand for being discourteous to a passenger. It was totally unjust, and strictly speaking, I should have resigned on the spot, only I've got a wife and son and jobs aren't easy to come by at present.

There was all that and trouble at home as well as Carol nagging

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me to take her on holiday with this girl friend of hers and her husband to Minorca instead of our usual Salcombe fortnight. I told her straight we couldn't afford it but I didn't like being asked in return why I couldn't earn as much as Sheila's Mike.

My manhood was at a low ebb. Then Sheila and Mike asked us to spend the day with them, Carol, Timothy, and me. They had been neighbors of ours but had just moved away and into a new house in one of those outer suburbs that are really in Essex. So I drove the three of us out to Theydon Bois and made my acquaintance with Epping Forest.

There are sixty-four square miles of forest, lying on the north-eastern borders of London. But when you drive down from the Wake Arms to Theydon along a narrow steep road bordered by woodland, stretches of turf and undergrowth, and little coppices of birch trees, you could easily believe yourself to be in the depths of the country. It seems impossible that London is only fourteen or fifteen miles away. The forest is silent and from a car looks unspoiled, though of course it can't be. We passed a woman walking a very unguard-like dog, a tiny Maltese terrier. That gave me the idea. Why shouldn't I come out here? Why shouldn't I try my frightening act out here where no one knew me?

Two days after that I did. It was spring and the evenings stayed light till nearly eight. I didn't take the car. Somehow it didn't seem to me as if the sort of person I was going to be, going to *act*, would have a car. The journey was awful, enough to deter anyone less determined than I was. I went straight from work, taking the Central Line tube as far as Loughton and then a bus up the hills and into the forest.

At the Wake Arms I got off and began to walk down the hill, not on the pavement but a few yards inside the forest itself. I didn't see a woman on her own until I had reached the houses of Theydon and begun the return trip. I had gone about a hundred yards up again when she came out of one of the last houses, a young girl in jeans and a jacket, her hands in her pockets.

It was clear she was going to walk to the Wake Arms, or so I thought. For a while I walked, keeping step with her, but unseen among the hawthorn and crabapple bushes, the tangle of brambles. I let us get a good quarter of a mile away from the houses before I showed myself and then I stepped out onto the pavement ahead of her. I turned round to face her and stood there, staring in the way I'd practised in the mirror.

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She wasn't very nervous. She was brave. It was only very briefly that she hesitated. But she didn't quite dare walk past me. Instead she crossed the road. There's never much traffic on that road and so far not a single car had passed. She crossed the road, walking faster. I crossed too but behind her and I walked along behind her. Presently she began to run, so of course I ran too, though not fast enough to catch up to her, just enough to gain on her a little.

We had been going on like that for some minutes, the Wake Arms still a mile off, when she suddenly doubled back, hared across the road, and began running back the way she had come. That finished me for chasing her. I stood there and laughed. I laughed long and loud, I felt so happy and free, I felt so much all-conquering power that I—I alone, humble, ordinary, dull *me*—could inspire such fear.

After that I took to going to Epping Forest as a regular thing. Roughly speaking, I'd say it would have been once a fortnight. Since I do shift work, four till midnight just as often as ten till six, I sometimes managed to go in the daytime. A lot of women are alone at home in the daytime and have no men around to escort them when they go out. I never let it go more than two weeks without my going there and occasionally I'd go more often—if I was feeling low in spirits, for instance, or Carol and I had a row or I got depressed over money. It did me so much good. I wish I could make you understand how much.

Just think what it is you do that gives you a tremendous lift—driving a car really fast or going disco dancing or getting high on something—well, frightening women did all that for me and then some. Afterward it was like Christmas, it was almost like being in love.

And there was no harm in it, was there? I didn't hurt them. There's a French saying: it gives me so much pleasure and you so little pain. That was the way it was for me and them, though it wasn't without pleasure for them either. Imagine how they must have enjoyed talking about it afterward, going into all the details as Carol did, distorting the facts, exaggerating, making themselves for a while the center of attraction.

For all I know they may have got up search parties, husbands and boy friends and fathers all out in a pack looking for me, all having a great time as people invariably do when they're hunting something or someone. After all, when all was said and done, what did I do? Nothing. I didn't molest them or insult them or try to touch them,

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I merely stood and looked at them and ran after them—or ran when they ran which isn't necessarily the same thing.

There was no harm in it—or so I thought. I couldn't see what harm there could ever be, and believe me, I thought about this quite a lot, for I'm just as guilt-ridden as the rest of us. I thought about it, justifying myself, keeping guilt at bay. Young women don't have heart attacks and fall down dead because a man chases them. Young women aren't left with emotional traumas because a man stares at them. The oldest woman I ever frightened was the one with the Maltese terrier and she was no more than forty. I saw her again on my third or fourth visit and followed her for a while, stepping out from behind bushes and standing in her path. She used the same words the girl in Queens Wood had used, uttered in the same strangled voice.

"What is it you want?"

I didn't answer her. I had mercy on her and her little ineffectual dog and I melted away into the woodland shades. The next one who asked me that I answered with professorial gravity:

"Merely collecting lichens, madam."

It was proof enough of how harmless I was that there was never a sign of a policeman in that area. I'm sure none of them told the police, for they had nothing to tell. They had only what they imagined and what the media had led them to expect. Yet harm did come of it, irrevocable harm and suffering and shame.

No doubt by now you think you've guessed. The inevitable must have happened, the encounter which any man who makes a practice of intimidating women is bound to have sooner or later, when the tables are turned on him. Yes, that did happen but it wasn't what stopped me. Being seized by the arm, hurled in the air and laid out, sprawled and bruised, by a judo Black Belt, was just an occupational hazard. I've always been glad, though, that I behaved like a gentleman. I didn't curse her or shout abuse. I merely got up, rubbed my legs and my elbows, made her a little bow, and walked off in the direction of the Wake. Carol wanted to know how I'd managed to get green stains all over my clothes and I think to this day she believes it was from lying on the grass in a park somewhere with another woman. As if I would!

That attack on me deterred me. It didn't put me off. I let three weeks go by, three miserable yearning weeks, and then I went back to the Wake road one sunny July morning and had one of my most satisfying experiences. A girl walking, not on the road, but taking

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a short cut through the forest itself. I walked parallel to her, sometimes letting her catch a glimpse of me. I knew she did, for as it had been with the girl in Queens Wood, I could sense and smell her fear.

I strolled out from the bushes at last and stood ahead of her, waiting. She didn't dare approach me, she didn't know what to do. At length she turned back and I followed her, threading my way among the bushes until she must have thought I had departed, then appearing once more on the path ahead. This time she turned off to the left, running, and I let her go. Laughing the way I always did, out loud and irrepressibly, I let her go. I hadn't done her any harm. Think of the relief she must have felt when she knew she'd got away from me and was safe. Think of her going home and telling her mother or her sister or her husband all about it.

You could even say I'd done her a good turn. Most likely I'd warned her off going out in the forest on her own and therefore protected her from some real degenerate or molester of women.

It was a point of view, wasn't it? You could make me out a public benefactor. I showed them what could happen. I was like the small electric shock that teaches a child not to play with the wires. Or that's what I believed. Till I learned that even a small shock can kill.

I was out in the forest, on the Wake road, when I had a piece of luck. It was autumn and getting dark at six, the earliest I'd been able to get there, and I didn't have much hope of any woman being silly enough to walk down that road alone in the dark. I had got off the bus at the Wake Arms and was walking slowly down the hill when I saw this car parked ahead of me at the curb. Even from a distance I could hear the horrible noise it made as the driver tried to start it, that anguished grinding you get when ignition won't take place.

The offside door opened and a woman got out. She was on her own. She reached back into the car and turned the lights off, slammed the door, locked it, and began walking down the hill toward Theydon. I had stepped in among the trees and she hadn't yet seen me. I followed her, working out what technique I should use this time. Pursuing her at a run to start with was what I decided on.

I came out onto the pavement about a hundred yards behind her and began running after her, making as much noise with my feet as I could. Of course she stopped and turned round as I knew she would. Probably she thought I was a savior who was going to do something about her car for her. She looked round, waiting for me,

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and as soon as I caught her eye I veered off into the forest once more. She gave a sort of shrug, turned, and walked on. She wasn't frightened—not yet.

It was getting darker, and there was no moon. I caught up with her and walked alongside, very quietly, only three or four yards away, yet in among the trees of the forest. By then we were out of sight of the parked car and a long way from being in sight of the lights of Theydon. The road was dark, though far from being impenetrably black. I trod on a twig deliberately, made it snap, and she turned swiftly and saw me.

She jumped. She looked away immediately and quickened her pace. Of course she didn't have a chance with me—a five-foot woman doesn't with a six-foot man. The fastest she could walk was still only my strolling pace.

There hadn't been a car along the road since I'd been following her. Now one came. I could see its lights welling and dipping a long way off, round the twists in the road. She went to the edge of the pavement and held up her hand the way a hitchhiker does. I stayed where I was to see what would happen. What had I done, after all? Only been there. But the driver didn't stop for her. Of course he didn't, no more than I would have done in his place. We all know the sort of man who stops his car to pick up smartly dressed pretty hitchhikers at night and we know what he's after.

The next driver didn't stop either. I was a little ahead of her by then, still inside the forest, and in his headlights I saw her face. She *was* pretty, not that that aspect particularly interested me, but I saw that she was pretty and that she belonged to the same type as Carol, a small slender blonde with sharp features and curly hair.

The darkness seemed much darker after the car lights had passed. I could tell she was a little less tense now. She probably hadn't seen me for the past five minutes—she might even have thought I'd gone. And I was tempted to call it a day, give up after a quarter of an hour, as I usually did when I'd had my fun.

I wish to God I had. I went on with it for the stupidest of reasons. I went on with it because I wanted to go in the same direction as she was going, down into Theydon and catch the tube train from there rather than go back and hang about waiting for a bus. I could have waited and let her go, but I didn't. Out of some sort of perverse need I kept step with her, then I came out of the forest and got onto the pavement behind her.

I walked along, gaining on her, but quietly. The road dipped,

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wound a little. I got two or three yards behind her, going very softly. She didn't know I was there, and then I began a soft whistling, a hymn tune it was, the Crimmon version of *The Lord Is My Shepherd.* What a choice!

She spun round. I thought she was going to say something but I don't think she could. Her voice was strangled by fear. She turned again and began to run. She could run quite fast, that tiny vulnerable blonde girl.

Car lights loomed up over the road ahead. They were full-beam undipped headlights, blazing blue-white across the surrounding forest, revealing every tree and making long black shadows spring from their trunks. I jumped aside and crouched in the long grass. She ran into the road, holding up both arms, and crying:

"Help me! Help me!"

The driver stopped. I had a moment's tension when I thought he might get out and come looking for me, but he didn't. He pushed open the passenger door from inside. The girl got in, they waited, sitting there for a minute, and then the white Ford Capri moved off.

It was a relief to me to see that car disappear over the top of the hill. And I realized, to coin a very appropriate phrase, that I wasn't yet out of the woods. What could be more likely than that the girl and the car driver would either phone or drop in at Loughton police station? I knew I'd better get myself down to Theydon.

As it happened I did so without meeting or being passed by another vehicle. On the station platform I had to wait for nearly half an hour before a train came, but no policemen came either. I had got away with it again.

In a way. There are worse things than being punished for one's crimes. One of those is not being punished for them. I am suffering for what I did by not being allowed—that is, by not allowing myself—to do it again. And I shall never forget that girl's face, so pretty and vulnerable and frightened. It comes to me a lot in dreams.

The first time it appeared to me was in a newspaper photograph, two days after I frightened her on the Wake road. The newspaper heading was the story of her death and that was why it had the picture. On the previous morning, when she had been dead twelve hours, her body had been found, stabbed and mutilated, in a field between Epping and Harlow. Police were looking for a man, thought to be the driver of a white Ford Capri.

Her rescuer, her murderer. Then what was I?

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a *NEW* detective story by

RICHARD FORREST

Meet a detective character new to the pages of EQMM—the unnamed headmaster of Greenfield Academy, New England—and is he a charmer! We hope there will be many more tales of the headmaster.

In this detective debut "the little old guy" considers the facts of a murder in a locked bedroom—a room with no means of access or egress, a room containing only one person other than the victim. The headmaster, a man of wit and wisdom, untangles the web of circumstantial evidence . . .

THE HEADMASTER HELPS ONE OF HIS BOYS

by RICHARD FORREST

If the fight hadn't occurred directly in front of the Administration Building, the headmaster might not have found out about it for at least an hour. As it happened, the noise produced by the group surrounding the participants was enough to cause him to trundle from his desk out to the stone steps where he stood blinking in the mellow autumn sun.

Bright red and yellow leaves waffled in the air as they floated toward the ground. A shaft of light glinted off the blade of the weapon held by the smaller of the two combatants.

"He's got a knife!" a smallish fourth former's voice cracked.

"Unfair, unfair!" was the raised chant.

It was an incongruous confrontation. The larger of the boys was obviously older and had a reach that exceeded the other's by several

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inches. He looked puzzled as he warily crouched. A lock of sandy hair fell over his forehead.

The boy holding the knife was slight and wiry. His narrow face was pinched in concentration as he circled the knife before him in slow lethal sweeps.

"I am appalled," the headmaster said as he approached the group. "This is unforgivable."

The crowd around the fighters parted and fell silent. The headmaster's cane tapped impatiently on the walk by his side. "Look at this. Just look at this," he said. "And just what is going on here?"

"We are fighting, sir," the larger of the boys said quietly.

"That is obvious and no excuse for the insult to a book."

The crowd's gaze fell to the sidewalk near the tapping cane. A library book lay splayed face down on the concrete.

"It fell from my hands, sir," the boy said as he hastily retrieved the volume and smoothed the pages flat.

"A book is a precious thing and should be treated with reverence," the headmaster said. "What's your name?" His cane pointed to the boy holding the knife.

"Braxton, sir."

"Come to my office, Braxton." He turned and scurried back toward the Administration Building.

Braxton shrugged. He flipped the knife blade closed, shoved it into his pocket, and slowly followed the headmaster.

Many years ago, when the Administration Building neared completion, the headmaster had expropriated a spot in the main hall for his desk and phone. He had never seen fit to occupy his more luxurious office on the second floor, which for reasons unknown, now contained old football helmets. Since the building housed several classrooms and the library, in addition to the academy's administrators, his central location gave the headmaster the opportunity to observe each boy at least once during the day as they entered and left the building.

Braxton stood stiffly before the desk. "I guess I'll be shipped."

"Shipped? We don't ship anyone at Greenfield. Ah, yes, you're Braxton. New boy, heh? As I recall, you've been at Choate, Kent, and Andover."

"They all shipped me."

"Is that a fact? A veritable Baedecker of New England preparatory schools, you are. Fighting, I would suppose?"

"Cheating, sir."

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"Cheating? Really? A difficult thing, cheating. Tried it once myself. Spanish, first level, as I recall. It created terrible problems. They promoted me to Spanish II, which made cheating twice as hard. Goodness knows what would have happened if I had gone on to Spanish III. . . Mother and I would like you to dine with us tonight, Mr. Braxton. We serve at eight."

The boy's shoulders slumped forward. His skin seemed to tighten even further over his drawn face. "I don't think I would really be welcome if you knew about me, sir."

The headmaster leaned forward slightly. "Is that a fact? Knew what, Mr. Braxton?"

The headmaster's wife was not an austere cook, but a believer in no-nonsense fare. Her meals, when they were not eating at the great hall with the students, consisted of an unadorned roast, potatoes, and a green vegetable. There was always more than enough.

The headmaster mumbled an inaudible grace, looked up to smile at his white-haired wife at the far end of the table, and then over at Braxton by his side. Dishes were passed.

"Mr. Braxton cheats, Mother," the headmaster said as the student flushed.

"I do hope you do it well, Mr. Braxton," she said. "It's terribly embarrassing to me when I find the boys doing it in the usual ways." She smiled at her husband at the head of the table.

"Mr. Braxton is in my geometry class."

She held the platter of lamb slices in one hand as she tilted her head to the side.

"I could never understand why one cheats in geometry. By the time you write down all those theorems in those little tiny places, you practically have them memorized anyway."

"It seems that Mr. Braxton has another problem, Mother," the headmaster said as he served himself a mound of mashed potatoes.

"What is that?"

The plate of lamb was passed to the head of the table. "His mother has been indicted for murder."

"How unpleasant," she said. "The headmaster will have to do something about that."

"That would be in order," the headmaster said as his fork speared three slices of lamb.

James L. Lambert slammed from his limousine and strode toward

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the construction trailer. On his way he hastily glanced up at the partially completed high-rise. It vaulted upward 29 stories with one more to go. He grimaced at the sight and threw open the trailer's metal door.

"Any messages?" he barked at the wispy blonde hovering over a desk piled with invoices and time cards.

She groaned and handed him a stack of two dozen pink message slips. "A thousand. The mayor's is on top. They want to put the tax abatement motion before the City Council tonight."

Lambert thumbed quickly through the messages. "About time," he mumbled. "Call Ajax Iron. I want another half-dozen iron men on high steel by tomorrow morning. If we don't top out by Friday, I won't get my next construction advance."

"Yes, sir." She pushed back a strand of hair and reached for the phone. Lambert began to walk toward his office in the rear of the trailer. "There was one odd call, Mr. Lambert. A funny-sounding old man. Said he wanted you to call at once."

"Everyone wants me to call at once," Lambert snapped over his shoulder.

"Said he was the headmaster," she mumbled and continued dialing Ajax Iron.

Lambert stopped and slowly turned. "The headmaster?"

"Uh, yes, something like that."

"Well, damn it! Don't just sit there. Get him on the phone. Never mind, I'll do it." He hurried toward the phone in his office. He knew the telephone number and dialed Greenfield Academy.

"Headmaster, sir. James Lambert, class of '50."

"Yes, Mr. Lambert. How nice of you to return my call. One of our boys up here is in difficulty and I need your help."

"Of course, sir."

"It seems that he comes from your city, Middleburg, and his mother is involved in some unpleasantness."

"What's his name, headmaster?"

"Braxton, but his mother's new married name is Lovelace."

"It's in all the newspapers down here, sir, and evidently quite a case. Mrs. Lovelace killed her husband after they had only been married a few months."

"I'd like the details, Lambert. Get everything all together. You know what I need—police reports, autopsy findings, all the things like that. I don't need to tell you what to do—as I recall, you did a

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fine job on a term paper back in '48. 'Mao and the Supremacy of the Red Revolution,' I believe it was called."

Lambert gulped. "I wish you wouldn't mention that paper, sir. I'm on the Republican State Committee now."

"Are you really, Lambert? Excellent. We shall put that in the next alumni news. Can you get that information for me and ship it up here by messenger on Saturday?"

"Saturday?" Lambert's mind went into overdrive calculations. He had the necessary clout to obtain the needed information but it would require a dozen personal visits to half a dozen city and state agencies and the calling in of two dozen past favors. It could be done, but it would be a full-time job.

"Did you hear me, Mr. Lambert?" the headmaster continued. "Remember. One of our boys is in trouble."

"I heard you, sir." His voice dropped. "I'll get the information to you by Saturday."

"Good fellow, Lambert."

The Lambert Construction Company pickup truck arrived at Greenfield Academy at noon on Saturday. The driver braked to a halt by the entrance to the Administration Building and leaned out the window to hail a passing student. "Where's a guy called the headmaster?"

The fifth former pointed down a curving walk now half-covered with bright autumn leaves. "See those two men walking down there?"

"The good-lookin' guy with the blond hair?"

"No, that's Mr. Galton of maintenance. The little old guy who walks kinda funny. That's the headmaster."

"I got a delivery for him," the driver said and slowly drove toward the walking couple.

The headmaster had the carton containing the murder-investigation material placed on his desk in the hallway. He noticed that the container was a liquor carton that had once held a case of Chivas Regal. He was glad that James Lambert '50 had good taste. He began to unpack the documents, depositions, and reports and organize them in a manner that followed the thread of the murder investigation.

Helen Braxton Lovelace married William Lovelace, 20 years her senior, on April 4th of this year. On August 11, Mr. Lovelace was dead. On August 12 a warrant was served on Mrs. Lovelace and she

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was arrested on a charge of felony murder in the first degree. She was presently out on $100,000 bail pending the commencement of her trial.

The headmaster picked up a group of 8-by-10 glossy photographs. He shuffled them into sequence and began to examine each one carefully. The first was an exterior shot of the Lovelace mansion. It was a large English Tudor house with a circular drive bracketed by well-tended box hedges. A white magic-marker circle had been drawn around two second-floor windows. An inscription on the back of the picture stated that the windows were located in the master bedroom where the body of Mr. Lovelace had been discovered.

The headmaster took a magnifying glass from his center drawer and examined the area immediately above, below, and to the side of the murder-scene windows. There was a sheer drop of at least thirty feet to the ground, no windows were located above the bedroom, and there were no cornices, overhangs, or crevices that would have afforded a hand- or foothold for an intruder.

A detective report taken from the carton revealed there were no footprints or ladder marks in the soft moist soil immediately below the murder-scene windows.

A second group of photographs consisted of interior shots taken inside the murder room. The headmaster wrinkled his nose as he hastily flipped through them. It was not a pleasant task, but then again, it had to be done. He reshuffled the pictures and began again, this time carefully examining each detail.

The corpse lay supine on the twin bed nearer to the door. A blanket and sheet were half drawn off the pajama-clad body and the handle of a large kitchen knife protruded from the center of the chest. There were several shots of the body from different angles and heights. A few pictures also showed the other twin bed with its rumpled bedding.

A final photograph showed the bedroom door hanging from one hinge at a canted angle. It was obvious that force had been used to gain entrance into the room. A key in the door's inner lock was still visible.

The next item the headmaster examined was a signed statement by the deceased's wife, Mrs. Braxton Lovelace.

"My husband and I dined at nine with our house guest, his nephew, Roger Thornberry. We lingered over coffee, but since I had a headache, I retired at 11:00 P. M. and shortly fell asleep. I heard no sound or movement during the night as I am a heavy sleeper.

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"When I awakened, at approximately 7:00 A.M., I noticed that William was quite still. When I approached the bed I saw that . . . that thing sticking out of his chest.

"It was quite obvious that he was dead. I was so shocked that I stood in the center of the floor and began to scream. Shortly, Mr. Thornberry and our butler, Mr. Bowman, heard my cries and began to pound on the door. I was quite hysterical and continued screaming. They broke into our bedroom and someone immediately called the police.

"I did not lock the door when I retired as there is only one key. I assume that my husband locked it when he came to bed."

The headmaster began to leaf through the other documents. The majority of the statements were corroborations of Mrs. Lovelace's initial affidavit. Several servants testified that there was only one key to the master-bedroom door and also that there was no other entrance to the room. The nephew, Roger Thornberry, swore that he awoke on hearing Mrs. Lovelace's screams. He tried the master-bedroom door, found it locked, and with the aid of the butler broke the door off a hinge in their effort to gain access to the murder room.

A copy of William Lovelace's last will and testament indicated that his sizeable estate would be equally divided between his widow Helen Braxton Lovelace and his nephew Roger Thornberry.

The headmaster turned to the autopsy report and tried to gain an understanding from the scientific language. Death had been instantaneous sometime between midnight and 5:00 A.M. The cause of death was a sharp implement which punctured the sternum and entered the left ventricle. There had been little exterior bleeding. Marked lividity was apparent in the lower extremities.

The Assistant State Prosecutor assigned to the Lovelace case wrote a short and precise memo to the State Prosecutor:

"Helen B. Lovelace is an attractive woman interested in money and obviously restless in her new marriage. In a moment of ill-considered rage she stabbed her husband with a knife which we can place among the mansion's kitchen utensils. Frightened over her act, she screamed until others rushed to her aid. She then tried to claim that an intruder broke into the house, stole the knife from its place in the kitchen, and somehow entered a locked room to quietly kill Lovelace.

"The state can positively prove that she, to the exclusion of all others, was alone in the murder room and had motive and opportunity for the murder.

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"Recommend immediate indictment."

The headmaster piled the material back in the Chivas Regal carton and sighed. Young Braxton would bear a heavy cross this year and it was his job to find the boy some relief.

He would tour the campus on his daily inspection for trash and consider the matter most carefully.

James L. Lambert popped the champagne cork, and watched it sail over the edge of the roof and fall to the ground thirty floors below.

A cheer went up from the dozen hardhats standing on the hastily planked roof of the building's final story. There was another rousing cheer as a topping-ceremony American flag was raised.

Lambert held the bubbling bottle of champagne in the air. "I hereby declare this building—"

A young workman, clutching a phone receiver with a long wire trailing behind him, climbed the ladder to the roof. "Phone call, Mr. Lambert. Some guy who claims he's the headmason."

"Headmaster," Lambert said with a sigh as he handed the champagne bottle to a construction supervisor and took the phone. "Yes, sir," he said brightly.

"I need a door," the headmaster said.

"A door, sir? Like a room door?"

"Exactly. As I recall, Lambert, you own a construction company. You must have plenty of doors."

"Of course, sir. If you give me an idea of what building or room the door is for, I can send you up something appropriate." He had a mental image of a large group of crazed sixth formers wrecking the dining-hall front door in some mad fashion.

"The murder-room door," the headmaster replied. "I want an exact duplicate of the Lovelace murder-room door along with an exact duplicate of the lock and key. You had better put the door in some sort of frame so that I can open and close it."

A cold autumn breeze blew across the rooftop. The workmen were upending open bottles and drinking the remainder of the champagne. Lambert covered one ear and stooped over in order to hear better. "The murder-room door," he echoed.

"And don't forget the lock. That's most important. The identical lock and key. You can send it up with the man who brought the other material. Competent fellow, reminded me of Craniston, class of '36."

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"Craniston, sir?" Lambert said. "A lock and door. I'll send it right up." He handed the phone receiver to the messenger and turned to find that the last of the champagne had been drunk.

The headmaster decided to take a walk and think about the problem. He donned a car coat, took his cane off the edge of the desk, and went down the Administration Building steps.

He paused at the bottom of the steps and took the rubber cap off the bottom of his cane to reveal a needle-like tip which he used to impale stray bits of trash he discovered during his walk.

It was a bright New England fall afternoon. The trees were nearly bare and the faint smell of burning leaves was vague in the air. He hunched over and deep in thought walked down the paths of Greenfield Academy. Bevies of young men and boys parted as he approached; several gave salutations but were not surprised when he didn't answer.

Helen Braxton Lovelace had a motive for murder. She was seemingly alone in a locked room with the victim during the time of the killing and there appeared to be no means of access to or egress from the room. It was what any prosecutor would term a web of circumstantial evidence. She would be tried and convicted, and young Braxton would continue to have difficulties.

It was a problem that required thought.

"Headmaster."

"Yes?" He stopped and turned to face the driver of the Lambert Construction Company pickup truck.

"I have a door and frame for you. Where do you want it?"

"Right here will be fine."

The driver looked up and down the empty walk. "Where?"

"Here. On the walk. It's level and should prove adequate."

The driver shrugged and climbed from the cab to lower the tailgate. It took him a few minutes to wrestle the heavy door in its wooden frame with supporting legs onto the pavement. His forehead was beaded with perspiration when he had finished.

"That will do nicely," the headmaster said as he approached the frame. He opened the door, turned the key in the lock on the inside, then slammed the door, and stepped around the frame to the far side. He tried turning the door handle and found it locked. "Thank you," he said. "Now you can take it back to Mr. Lambert with my thanks.". . .

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James L. Lambert had his pen poised over the lease agreement in the conference room of the Middleburg National Bank. Once his signature was affixed, one-half of the high-rise would be rented to an AAA tenant, the Nutmeg Insurance Company. The project would be assured of financial success.

The lawyers, bankers, and insurance men in the room around him were quiet, poised in silent tableau as if holding their mutual breath as they awaited his signature.

"Call for you, Mr. Lambert," the bright-faced secretary said as she poked her head through the door. "It's from Mr. Headman."

Lambert sighed.

"That's the headmaster. I'll take it in your office."

"Damn it, man! Sign!" Theodore Greeley, president of the bank, said impatiently.

"In a minute," Lambert replied as he wearily walked out of the conference room into the small office where he picked up the phone. "You wanted me, sir?"

"Yes, Lambert," the headmaster said. "I want you to go to the police authorities and tell them that Mrs. Lovelace is innocent."

"I don't think they'll believe me, sir," he said.

"Of course they will, Lambert. Just tell them we have the solution to the case. Have confidence in yourself, Lambert. Never amount to anything without confidence."

"Confidence. I'll try. What's the solution?"

"You had better take notes, Lambert. Remember that history test in '49 when you forgot to answer the questions on the last page."

"I remember." He automatically reached across the desk for a pad and pencil and wondered if neatness counted.

"A locked room is a state of mind. In the Lovelace murder it was assumed that there was no way to get into the murder room. It would seem impossible to go in or out windows, and the door was locked from the inside."

"She had to be the one who did it, headmaster."

"I have discovered that the door contained a Walsh lock which can be locked from the inside while the door is open. When shut it remains in a locked position."

"I don't understand."

"The autopsy report states that there was lividity in the lower extremities. If Mr. Lovelace were killed while in a supine position in bed, the lividity would have been to his back. He was killed in a sitting position and remained in that position for some time before

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the body was moved. He was killed in another room, moved upstairs, and arranged on the bed. The murderer, the nephew, then locked the door on the inside and closed it from outside the room. He was able to do this without waking Mrs. Lovelace. Sedative in her after-dinner coffee, I would imagine."

"That makes a hell of a lot of sense," Lambert said.

"Of course it does. Now run over to the police immediately and tell them. I don't want young Braxton worried another night over this matter."

The young man stood before the desk in the hallway of the Administration Building and shifted restlessly from one foot to another.

The headmaster looked up. "Yes, Mr. Braxton?"

"They have dropped the charges against my mother and arrested Mr. Thornberry."

"Glad to hear that. They did the right thing."

"I want to thank you, sir."

"Nothing to thank me for, Braxton." He wrinkled his brow. "I am concerned about your not signing up for a winter sport."

"I don't know what to do, sir. The only thing I do well is play tennis and Greenfield doesn't have any indoor courts."

The headmaster looked thoughtful for a moment and then rose from his desk and walked over to a closet. He opened the door and rummaged through the cluttered interior until he found what he wanted. "I'll trade you this racket for something."

The boy took the racket. "Funny-looking tennis racket."

"Squash, Braxton. We have indoor squash courts at Greenfield. Since I thought you would be by this afternoon I have Murphy waiting for you on court two."

"Who's Murphy?"

"The boy you were fighting with. You will find squash a very aggressive sport."

"Yes, sir. I'm sure I will. Thank you, sir." Braxton turned to leave.

"You've forgotten something, young man."

"I have?"

"I said I would trade you the racket for something."

"I don't have anything to trade, headmaster."

"I'm sure you do." Their eyes met.

The boy reached into his pocket and handed the knife to the headmaster. "I guess I do."

"Very good, Braxton. You are coming right along."

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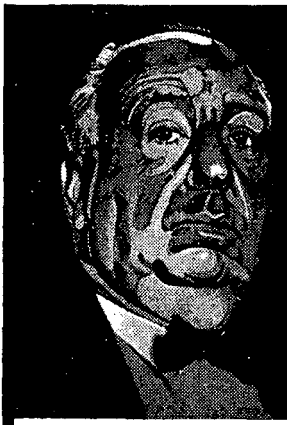

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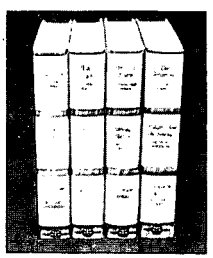

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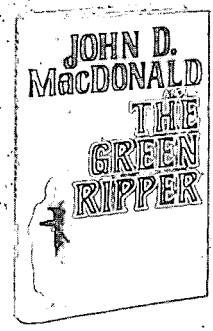

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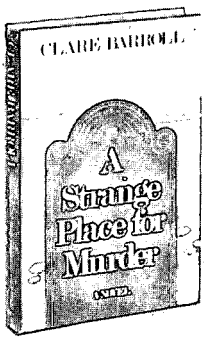

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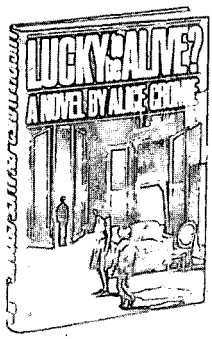

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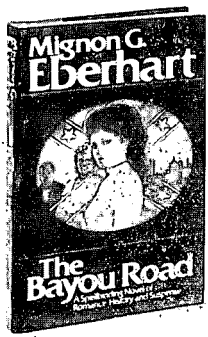

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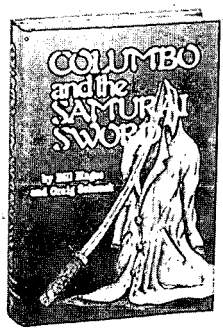

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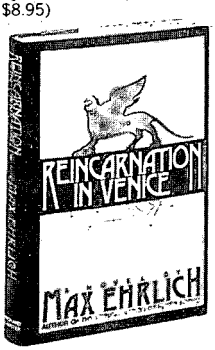

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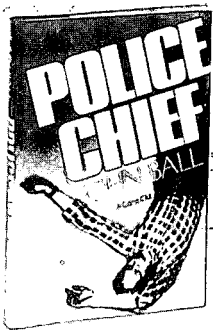

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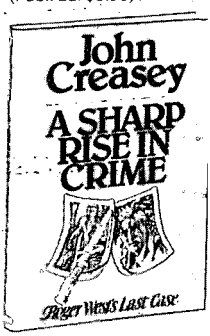

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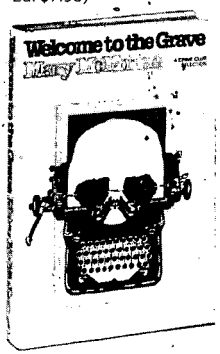
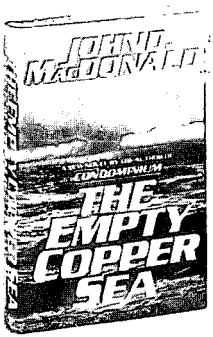
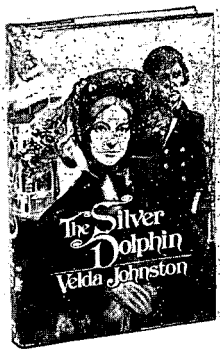


Welcome to the Grave by Mary McMullen. (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

The Saint in Trouble by Leslie Charteris. (Publ. Ed. $7.95)



The Empty Copper Sea by John D. MacDonald. (Publ. Ed. $8.95)



The Silver Dolphin by Velda Johnston. (Publ. Ed. $7.95)

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